

THE ARGOSY.

MAY, 1876.

EDINA.

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CHAPTER XIII.

MR. PELLET IN THE CHURCHYARD.

TRENNACH churchyard was a lonely place at all times ; but it looked particularly so in the twilight of a dull evening. The trees took fantastic shapes to the eye ; the grave-mounds and the head-stones reminded you unpleasantly that you yourself must sometime lie beneath them.

Especially grey were the skies this evening ; for, though it was summer weather, the day had been a very dull day : and Mr. Blase Pellet, sitting in the middle of the churchyard on the old stump of a cut-down tree, looked grey and gloomy as the weather and the graves.

Since the departure from Trennach of Rosaline Bell—for whom Mr. Blase Pellet did undoubtedly entertain a fond and earnest affection, whatever might be his shortcomings generally—he had found his evening hours, when the chemist's shop was closed for the night, hang heavily on his hands. With the absence of Rosaline, the two chief relaxations in which Mr. Blase employed his leisure were gone : namely, the cunning contrivings to meet her, either at her home or abroad ; and his watching the movements of Frank Raynor. The young man's jealousy of the latter and Rosaline burnt as fiercely as ever, tormenting him to a most unreasonable degree : though, indeed, when was jealousy ever amenable to reason ? There was no longer any personal intercourse between Frank Raynor and Rosaline ; Blase knew quite well that could not be, for Frank was here, and she was at Falmouth ; but he had felt as sure, ever since she went, that their intercourse was continued by letter, as that he was now sitting on the stump of the tree.

Jealousy needs no proof to confirm it: our great master-intellect has told us that it makes the food it feeds on. And upon this airy kind of unsubstantial food had Mr. Pellet been nourishing his suspicions of the mutual correspondence—which existed in his imagination alone. He had watched the postman in a morning, he had waylaid him, and by apparently artless questions had got him to disclose to whom the letter was addressed, which he had just left at Dr. Raynor's: and the less proof he could find of the suspected correspondence, the brighter did his untenable jealousy burn. For it was not often that the postman could say the letter which he might have chanced to leave at the Doctor's house was for Mr. Frank Raynor. Sometimes it would be for the Doctor himself, sometimes for Miss Raynor; but very rarely for Frank. Frank's correspondence did not seem to be an extensive one. This might possibly have satisfied an ordinary young man: it only tended to strengthen Mr. Blase Pellet's raging doubts: and now, on this ill-favoured evening, those doubts had received "confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ."

Since there could be no longer love-meetings of his own to seek, or surreptitious dodgings of other people to pursue, Mr. Blase Pellet was rather at a loss to know what to do with his evenings. To render him justice, it must be admitted that he did not follow the Trennach fashion, and spend them at the Golden Shaft. He was a steady young man; in some respects better than many of his neighbours. Finding the hours lie on his hands, he took to look in unceremoniously at the houses of his acquaintance, and pass an interlude in chat more or less agreeable. On this evening he had so favoured Clerk Trim: and it was in crossing the churchyard, after quitting that functionary's dwelling, that he had come to an anchor on the stump. Bitter anger was aroused within him; raging jealousy; a tumultuous thirst for revenge. For, in the clerk's house he had just been furnished, as he believed, with the confirmation yearned for.

When Frank Raynor, so lightly and heedlessly, had sent Clerk Trim to Tello, to inquire for certain imaginary letters at the post-office there, he little thought what grave consequences would arise from it in the future. Just for the sake of getting the clerk out of the way during the ceremony of the stolen marriage, he had invented this fruitless errand. When the clerk came back in the course of the day, and reported to him that no letter was lying for him at the post-office at Tello, the man added, "And I've taken care not to mention to a soul, sir, where I've been, as you desired, neither will I." "Oh, thank you, but I don't in the least mind now whether you mention it or not," rejoined Frank in the openness of his heart. For, now that the object was attained, it did not matter to him if all the world knew that he had sent the clerk to Tello.

Clerk Trim was naturally a silent man, and therefore he had experienced no temptation to speak of it, in spite of the release given him:

but on this evening, talking with Blase Pellet of Tello, he said that he had been there lately. Mr. Blase expressed some surprise at this, knowing that journeys were rare events with the clerk; and then Trim mentioned what he had gone for: to inquire for a letter at the Tello post-office for Mr. Frank Raynor.

That was enough. And a great deal more than enough. Blase instantly jumped to the conclusion that it was *there*, through the Tello post-office, that the correspondence with Rosaline was carried on. And perhaps it was not unnatural that he should think so.

Forth he came, boiling and bursting, crossed the stile, and dropped down on the tree-stump, unable to get any farther. With his bitter indignation mingled a great deal of despair. In that one miserable moment he began to see that he might indeed lose Rosaline. To lose her would have been anguish unspeakable; but to see another gain her was simply torment—and that other the detested gentleman, Frank Raynor. Blase Pellet had not a very clear idea of social distinctions, and he saw no particular incongruity in Frank's making her his wife.

"I've kept quiet as yet about that past night's work," said Mr. Pellet to himself, "but I'll speak now. I kept quiet for her sake, knowing what pain it would bring her; not for his; and because—Well, any way," he added, after a long pause, "I must feel my way in it. If I can only drive him away from Cornwall for good, that would be enough; and then I'd draw in again. I heard him tell old Float that he meant to be off to London soon and settle there: let him go and leave me and Rose and these parts alone. I'll help to drive him there; and when he's gone I'll keep silent again. But now—how much will it be safe to say?—and how can I set about it?"

Leaning forward, his two hands placed on his knees, pressing them almost to pain, his eyes fixed on the opposite hedge, he thought out his thoughts. Blase Pellet was of an extremely concentrative nature: he could revolve and debate doubts and difficulties in his own mind, until he saw his way to bring them out straight in the end, just as patiently and successfully as a student works out a problem in Euclid. But the difficulty Blase was trying to solve now was not easy.

"I *can't* say I saw it," debated he. "I *can't* say I heard it. If I did, people would ask five hundred questions, as to where I was, and how it came about, and I might have to tell all. I don't care to do that. I won't do it, unless I'm forced. Let him go away and leave her alone hereafter, and he shall get off scot free for me. If I told of him, I should have to tell of her—that she was present—and she'd not like it; neither should I, for I'd be sorry to bring the pain and exposure on her. She ought to have denounced him at the time—and she was a regular simpleton for not doing it: but still it would not be

pleasant for me to be the one to proclaim that she was there and witnessed it all. No, no : I may not say I know *that* : I dare not say I was a witness myself. I must find some other way."

The other way seemed to be a mile off. Mr. Pellet took his eyes from the hedge, and his hands from his knees ; but only to fix them on the same places again. The stump of the tree was as uneasy a seat as its once green and flourishing topmost bough must have been, to judge by the restless fit that was upon him as he sat on it.

"Could I say I dreamt it?" cried he suddenly, ceasing his shuffling, and holding his head bolt upright. "*Could* I? I don't see any other way. Let's think it out a bit."

The thinking out took a tolerably long time yet, and Mr. Pellet did not seem altogether to like his idea. It was pretty nearly pitch dark when he at length rose from the stump, sighing heavily.

"I must be uncommon cautious," said he. "But it's just one of those ticklish things that admit of no openings but one. If Rosaline got to know that I saw—and told—she'd just fling me over for ever. I think a word or two of suspicion will be enough to drive him away, and that's all I want."

Now in the main, Blase Pellet was not a hard-hearted or vindictive young man. His resentment against Frank Raynor arose from jealousy. Even that resentment, bitter though it was, he did not intend, or wish, to gratify to anything like its full extent. Believing that certain testimony of his could place Frank's neck in jeopardy, he might surely be given credit for holding his tongue. It is true that his caution arose from mixed motives : the dread of exasperating, or in any way compromising Rosaline ; the dislike to mix himself up with the doings of that past night ; and the genuine horror of bringing any man to so dire a punishment, even though that man were Frank Raynor.

Pondering upon these various doubts and difficulties, and failing to feel perfectly reassured upon them in his own mind—or rather upon what the result would be if he moved in the matter—Mr. Pellet went slowly home through the dark and deserted street ; and ascended straight to his chamber, which was an attic in the roof. There, he put himself down on the side of his low bed in much the same musing attitude that he had sat on the tree-stump.

"Yes, it must be a dream," he decided at length, beginning to unbutton his waistcoat preparatory to retiring. "There is no other way. I must not say I was there and saw it—they'd turn round upon me and cry out, Why didn't you tell before now? And I can't and I won't bring in Rosaline's name—which I should have to do if I stated the truth outright. But I can say I dreamt it : dreamt that Bell is lying at the bottom of the shaft ; and keep up the commotion a bit. They can't turn round on me for *that*. Folks do dream, and all the world knows they do."

As the days went on at the Mount, the lovers' meetings became more rare. Far from being able to steal out every evening, Margaret found that she could hardly get out at all. She was virtually a prisoner, so far as her evening's liberty was concerned. Either she had to stay in, reading to Lydia, or else Mrs. St. Clare would have her in the drawing-room. Upon only a half movement of Daisy's towards the open glass doors, Mrs. St. Clare would say, "You cannot go out in the evening air, Daisy: I shall have you ill, like Lydia."

Evening after evening Frank Raynor betook himself to the grounds about the Mount, and lingered in their wilderness, waiting for Daisy. Evening after evening he had to go back again as he came, not having seen her. But one evening, when his patience was exhausted, and he had taken the first step of departure, Daisy came flying through the trees and fell into his arms.

"I was determined to come," she said, a nervous sobbing catching her breath. "I am watched, Frank; I am perpetually hindered. Mamma has just gone to her room with a headache, and I ran out. Oh Frank, this can't go on. I have so wanted to see you!"

"It has been uncommonly hard, I can tell you, Daisy, to come here, one evening after another, and to have to go back as I came."

"This is the *first* opportunity I have had. It is indeed, Frank. And if that Tabitha should come prying into the drawing-room, as I know she will, and finds me gone out of it, I don't care. No, I don't."

He took her upon his arm and they paced together as formerly. The moon was bright to-night, and flickered through the leaves on Daisy's head.

"Of course this cannot go on," observed Frank, in assent to what she had just said. "I should make a move at once, but for one thing."

"What sort of move?"

"To leave Trennach. The reason I have not done so, is this, Daisy. In speaking again the other morning to my uncle, telling him that I must go to London, he made no further opposition to it: only, he begged me to remain with him until Edina returned——"

"Where is she going?" interrupted Daisy.

"To Bath. On a week or ten days' visit to Major and Mrs. Raynor. Daisy, I should not *like* to leave my uncle alone; he is not well; and therefore I will stay, as he wishes. But as soon as Edina is back here, I will go to London, and see about our future home."

"Yes," said Daisy. "Yes."

She spoke rather absently. Indeed, in spite of the first emotion, she appeared to be less lively than usual; more pre-occupied. The fact was, she wanted to ask Frank a question or two, and did not know how to do it.

"Edina goes to-morrow," he resumed. "She intends to be back in a week's time; but I give her a day or two longer, for I know how

unwilling they always are at Spring Lawn to let her come away. After that, I wind up with the Doctor, and go to London. And it will not be very long then, Daisy, before I am back here to claim you. I shall soon get settled, once I am on the spot and looking out: the grass will not be let grow under my feet. It won't take above a week or two."

How sanguine he was! Not a shadow of doubt rested on his mind that the "week or two" would see him well established. Daisy did not answer. Had Frank chanced to turn his head as they walked, he would have seen how white her face was.

It was a simple question that she would ask. And yet, she could not ask it. Her dry and quivering lips refused to frame the words. "Were you so very intimate with Rosaline Bell?—and did you really love her?" Easy words they seem to say; but Daisy could not get them out in her terrible emotion.

And so, they parted, and she had not spoken. For the hour was late already, and she feared to stay out longer. And Frank went home unsuspecting and unconscious.

It was on the following morning that certain rumours were afloat in Trennach. They had arisen the previous day: at least two or three people professed to have then heard them. The miners congregated in groups to discuss the news; Float the druggist and other tradesmen stood at their shop doors, to exchange words on the subject with the passers-by. It was said that Josiah Bell was lying in the Bottomless Shaft. Instead of having walked off in some mysterious manner, to return some day as mysteriously—as his wife believed—he was lying dead in that deep pit on the Bare Plain.

But—whence arose these rumours? what was their foundation? Nobody could tell. Just like other unaccountable rumours that float about us and are whispered from one to the other in daily intercourse, it seemed that none could trace their source.

This same morning was the one of Edina's departure for the neighbourhood of Bath. Frank was about to drive her to the railway station. The gig was already at the door, the small trunk strapped on behind: for she never encumbered herself with much luggage. Frank was in the surgery, busying himself until she should appear, and talking with his uncle, when the door opened, and Ross, the overseer, came in. He had not been well lately, and had come occasionally to the surgery for advice.

"Have you heard this new tale they've got hold of now, Doctor?" asked he, while Dr. Raynor was questioning him of his symptoms. "It's a queer one."

"I have heard no tale," said the Doctor. "What is it?"

"That the missing man is lying at the bottom of the old shaft on the Plain. Bell."

A moment's startled pause; a rush of red to his brow; and then Frank spoke up hastily from his place amid the bottles.

"What an utter absurdity! Who says so?"

"It is being said among the men," replied Ross, turning to him. "They can talk of nothing else this morning."

The colour was receding from Frank's face, leaving it whiter than usual.

"Bell at the bottom of the shaft on the Plain!" exclaimed Dr. Raynor. "But why are they saying it? Who says it?"

Ross extended his hand, and pointed to the knots of men in the street, some of whom were in view of the window. "All the lot of them, Doctor. They are talking of nothing else."

"What are their grounds for it?"

"I've not got to them yet. I don't think they know."

Since the first hasty words, Frank had remained dumb, apparently paying attention to his physic. He spoke again now in a sharp, rasping tone; which was very unusual, and therefore noticeable.

"It is not *likely* that there are grounds for it. I wonder, Ross, you can come here and repeat such nonsense!"

"The place is agog with it; that's all I know," replied Ross, sulkily, as he went out. He could not bear to be found fault with.

Dr. Raynor followed him to the door. After a glance up and down the street at the men, collected in it, he returned to the surgery.

"It is evident that something or other is stirring them," he observed to Frank. "I wonder what can have led to the report?"

"Some folly or other, Uncle Hugh. It will die away again."

Dr. Raynor stood near the window; his eyes were fixed on the outer scenes, but his mind was far away. Frank, who had made a finish of his physic, was buttoning his coat.

"I have never believed aught but the worst, since Bell's disappearance," said the Doctor. "Others have expected him to come back again: I never have. Where he may be, I know not: whether accident, or aught else of ill may have chanced to him, I know not: but I entertain no hope that the man is still in life."

There was a pause. "Have you any reason for saying that, sir?" asked Frank, somewhat hesitatingly.

"No reason in the world," replied Dr. Raynor. "At least, no tangible reason. I am an old man, Frank, and you are a young one; and what I am about to say you will probably laugh at. I did not like the look of Bell when we last saw him."

Frank was at a loss to understand: and said so.

"I did not like that grey look on his face," continued the Doctor. "Do you remember it?"

"Yes, I do, Uncle Hugh. It was very peculiar. Sometimes when a person is ill, or going to be ill, the face will take quite a grey tinge

from the loss of colour, and we say to him or her, You are looking grey this morning. But the grey shade on Bell's face was quite different."

"Just so," assented the Doctor. "And it takes an educated eye—or, I would rather say, an eye possessing a peculiar discernment—to be able to distinguish the one shade from the other: but, to the eye which can do so, it is unmistakable. The grey hue that was on Bell's face I had observed three times before during my life, in three different men: but in each of the cases it was the forerunner of death."

Dr. Raynor's voice had taken a solemn tone. Frank, far from laughing, seemed to catch it as he spoke.

"Do you mean the forerunner of fatal sickness, sir?"

"Only in one of the cases, Frank. The man had been ill for a long while, but his death was entirely unexpected and sudden. The other two had no sickness at all, short or long: they died without it."

"From accident?"

"Yes, from accident. I should not be likely to avow as much to anybody but you, Frank, and run the risk of being ridiculed: but I tell you that when I saw Bell come in here that morning with the peculiar grey look on his face, it shocked me. I believed then, as firmly as I ever believed any truth in my life, that the man's hours were numbered."

Frank neither stirred nor spoke. Just for the moment he might have been thought a statue.

"Where Bell is, or where he got to, I know not; but from the time I first heard of his disappearance, I feared the man was dead," added Dr. Raynor. "The probability was, I thought, that he had fallen down in some fit, that had been, or would be, fatal. And I confess the great marvel to me throughout, has been, that his body could not be found. If this rumour be true—that he is lying at the bottom of the used-up shaft—the marvel is accounted for."

"But—is—is it likely to be true, sir?" cried Frank, in hot remonstrance.

"Very likely, I think," replied the Doctor. "Though I cannot imagine what should bring him *there*."

"Are you ready, Frank?" asked Edina, appearing at the door in her grey plaid shawl and plain straw bonnet. "Good-bye, papa. I have been looking for you."

Dr. Raynor stooped to kiss his daughter quietly: he was not a demonstrative man. Hester was at the door: the boy held the horse's head. Frank helped Edina in; and, taking the reins in his hand, followed her.

"You will not stay too long, Edina?"

"Only the eight or nine days that I am going for, papa."

They drove on. It was a lovely summer's day; and Edina, who enjoyed the sunshine, the balmy atmosphere, the blue sky, the waving

trees, and everything else pertaining to this serene, out-door life, sat still, and looked about her. Frank was unusually silent. In point of fact, the rumour he had just heard, touching Bell, had well-nigh struck him dumb. Edina might have wondered at this prolonged silence of his, but that she was deep in thought herself.

"Frank," she began, as they neared the station, "I wish you would answer me a question."

He glanced quickly round at her, dread in his heart. Did the question concern the Bottomless Shaft?

"Do you know whether anything is amiss with papa?"

It was like a relief; and Frank, ever elastic, brightened up at once.

"Amiss with him? In what way, Edina?"

"With himself; with his health. In the last few weeks he seems to have changed so very much: sometimes he seems quite like a broken-down man. Don't you see that he is ill, Frank?"

"Yes, I am sure he is," replied Frank readily. "But I don't know what it is that's the matter with him."

"It seems to me that he wants rest."

"He gets more rest than he used to get, Edina; I save him all I can. There are some cranky patients who *will* have him, you know."

"I hope it is nothing serious! Do you think he will soon be better?"

Frank touched the horse with the whip: which perhaps made his excuse for not answering. "Had Uncle Hugh been in active condition, I should have left him before this," he observed. "But I want to see him stronger first. He might chance to get some fellow in my place who would not be willing to take most of the work on his shoulders."

"Left him to set up for yourself, do you mean, Frank?"

"To be sure. I ought to, you know," he added with a slight laugh.

She understood the allusion. It was the first time Frank's stolen marriage had been alluded to by either of them, since the day it took place.

"How are you getting on, Frank?" she asked in a low tone, as he drew up outside the station. "You and Daisy?"

"Not getting on at all. She is there, and I am elsewhere. Now and then I see her for five minutes in their garden; but that's pretty nearly stopped now. Until last night, she has been unable to escape from the house for I don't know how long. Of course it is not a lively condition of things."

"It seems to me to be the same thing with you as though you had not been married."

"It is just precisely the same, Edina."

CHAPTER XIV.

LOOKING OUT FOR EDINA.

IN the bow-window of the shabby dining-room at Spring Lawn, gazing through it earnestly, stood Major Raynor, his wife, and the children. They were on the tiptoe of expectation, waiting for Edina. A vehicle of some kind could be discerned in the road at a distance; opinions differed, as to whether it was a fly, or not. The evening sunbeams fell athwart the green lawn and on the clustering flowers, whose perfume mingled with that of the hay, lying in cocks in the adjoining field.

"I am sure it *is* a fly," cried little Kate, shading her eyes with her hands, that she might see the better.

"And I tell you it is not," retorted Alfred. "That thing, whatever it is, is coming on at a snail's pace like a waggon. Do you suppose Edina is coming in a waggon, little stupid?"

"I don't think it is a waggon," said Major Raynor, who had the aid of an opera-glass. "It has two horses abreast, at any rate. The driver is whipping them up, too: and see—it is coming along now at a strapping pace. I should say it is a large fly."

Every now and then the vehicle lost itself behind trees and hedges and turnings of the road: from the temporary glimpses they caught, it seemed to them to have something like a cart-load of luggage piled upon its roof. Which was extremely unlikely to belong to Edina.

On it came: its sound now could be heard, though itself was no longer visible. All ears were bent to catch it: and when abreast of the narrow avenue that led to the garden gate it was distinctly heard to turn off the road and rattle down.

"It is a fly," spoke Alice triumphantly. "And it is bringing Edina."

Charles strolled out to the gate to be in readiness. Away tore the children after him, shouting Edina's name in every variety of voice. Major and Mrs. Raynor followed, and were just in time to be at the drawing-up of the vehicle.

It was not a fly. It was a large, lumbering, disreputable conveyance that plied between Bath and some villages daily, and was called Tuppin's van. Disreputable as compared with a genteel, exclusive Bath fly that carried gentlefolks. This was used by only the inferior classes; people who knew nothing about "society."

Nevertheless, Edina was in it. Old Tuppin, throwing the reins across his horses, had left his box to go round to the door; which opened at the back after the manner of an omnibus. A sudden silence had fallen on the children. Edina got out. And Tuppin, touching his hat to Major and Mrs. Raynor, selected her trunk from the luggage on

the roof, and set it down inside the gate. Three male passengers, seated outside in front of the luggage, watched the proceedings.

Edina put a shilling into Tuppin's hand. He thanked her, ascended to his seat, touched his horses, turned them round, and drove up the avenue with a clatter. Edina was smothered with greetings and kisses on the lawn.

"But how could you come in that van, Edina?"

"The carriages at the station were scarce to-day, Charley. The only one I could see wanted to charge me six shillings. This van—but I call it an omnibus—was waiting there for a passenger, and I took advantage of it."

"It is Tuppin's van," persisted Charley. "Nobody ever travels by it, except servants."

"Nobody with a full pocket, perhaps," smiled Edina, with her straightforwardness and her imperturbable good humour. "I paid a shilling only, and came very comfortably."

"There was an old woman inside as well as you, Edina," cried Alfred.

"Yes. It was she who came by the same train that I did, and got out at the station. She is housekeeper, she told me, in some family near here."

Edina caught up little Bobby as she spoke, and the matter dropped. But an impression remained on the minds of the elder children that Edina was more stingy than ever, or she would never have travelled in Tuppin's van when she could have a fly for the hiring. Certainly Edina's ways were saving ways. As contrasted with their own reckless ones, they might appear "stingy." But the time was to come when they would learn how mistaken was the impression, and how entirely they had misjudged her.

"And how you getting on, Uncle Francis?" asked Edina.

"Backwards, my dear. What with no money, so to say, coming in, and everything going out——"

The Major stopped for want of words to express adequately the position. Edina resumed.

"But you have some money coming in, Uncle Francis. You have your income."

"But what is it, my dear, as compared with expenses? Besides, to tell you the truth, it is always forestalled. There always seems to be such a lot to pay."

"How uneasy it must make you!"

"Not a bit of it," spoke the Major cheerily. "With Eagles' Nest to look to in prospective, it does not signify at all. Talking of Eagles' Nest, Edina, have you heard anything of your Aunt Ann lately?"

"We never do hear from her, Uncle Francis. Papa writes to her sometimes, and I write, but we never get an answer."

"I fear she is on her last legs."

The Major spoke solemnly, with quite a rueful expression of countenance. Badly though he wanted the money that his sister's death would bring, and estranged from him though she was, he could not and did not think of it in any spirit but a sad one.

"I have heard from London two or three times lately, Edina, from my lawyer: John Street, you know. And in each letter he has given me a very poor account of Mrs. Atkinson. Her death, poor soul, must be very near."

It had been nearer than the Major, or even his lawyer, anticipated. She was dead. At this very moment, when the Major was talking of her, she was lying dead at Eagles' Nest. Had been dead three or four hours.

News of it reached them in the morning. A letter was delivered at Spring Lawn, and was carried up, as usual, to the Major in bed. Nobody took any particular notice of the letter: as a rule, the Major's letters were but applications from creditors, and could not be supposed to interest the household. Mrs. Raynor was seated at breakfast with her three elder children and Edina, when a sudden bumping on the floor above, and shouts in the Major's voice, startled them considerably.

"Good gracious! he must have fallen out of bed!" cried poor Mrs. Raynor.

"And upset his coffee," added Charley, with a laugh.

But it was nothing of the kind. The Major had jumped up to dress himself in hot haste, and was calling out to them between whiles. He had received news of the death of his sister, Mrs. Atkinson; and was going up forthwith to Eagles' Nest.

"Shall I go too, papa?" asked Charley.

"I don't mind, my boy. I suppose we can scrape up enough money for the tickets."

Of course the children were all in a commotion. Alfred marched up to the nursery, and drew the blinds down.

"What is that for, Master Alfred?" demanded the nurse, who was dressing Kate's doll; Kate herself standing by to watch the process.

"Ah, you don't know," replied Alfred, bursting with impatience to deliver his news, yet withholding it tantalizingly.

"No, I don't," said the nurse, who was often at war with Alfred. "You will have the goodness, sir, to draw the blinds up again, and leave them alone."

"I choose to have them down, nurse."

"You will choose to walk out of my nursery in a minute or two," retorted the nurse. "Wait till I've fixed this frock on. It would be a precious good thing if you were at school, Master Alfred!"

"But I am not going to school," cried Alfred in irrepressible delight,

the good news refusing to be kept down any longer. "I'm going somewhere else. Old Aunt Atkinson's dead, and papa has come into Eagles' Nest and a large fortune, Madam Nurse! And he is going up there to-day; and Charley's going; and we shall go directly. Eagles' Nest! Won't I have a pony to myself!—and a double-barrelled gun!—and a whole shop-full of sweet-stuff!"

Leaping over little Robert, who sat on the floor staring at him, he caught hold of Kate in the exuberance of his anticipations, and whirled her round till she was giddy. Then, attempting a leap across the table, he caught his foot on its edge: boy, table, and a heavy pincushion that was on it, called a "doctor," all came down together. The noise was something wonderful. It brought up Edina and Alice.

"Whatever is it, nurse?"

"Only one of Master Alfred's freaks, ma'am. He thought he would leap over the table."

Alfred was holding his handkerchief to his nose. He would not acknowledge that it bled.

"We thought the house was falling," said Alice. "It was worse than papa. He gave us the first fright."

"And all because he has come into some money, he says, Miss Raynor," put in the nurse, who was angrily picking up the table, "and the money is to buy him everything under the sun."

"Unseemly boasting, Alfred!" cried Edina. "Had you no thought for your poor aunt?"

"I don't see why I should have it, Edina," returned the boy boldly. "I never saw Aunt Atkinson in my life: why should I pretend to put on sorrow for her?"

"I never said you were to, child. Sorrow is real enough, and perhaps, Alfred, you will find that it comes to you often enough in life, without putting it on. But there is a wide gulf between feigning to be sorrowful, and being boisterously elated. As to the fortune, it may not make very much difference to you in any way."

"Oh, won't it though, Edina! Charley's not going to get it all."

"About the blinds, ma'am? Are they to be kept down?"

"I don't know, nurse. I will ask Mrs. Raynor."

"What an old croaker she is!" exclaimed Alfred, as Edina left the room.

"A bit of one," assented Alice.

"That she is not, Miss Alice," said the nurse. "If all of you were only half as good as Miss Edina Raynor!"

When the necessary money for the journey came to be looked after, it was found that the Major and all his household could not scrape it together: though it sounds like a ridiculous fact. Edina came forward with help; and so it was raised.

"I trust it will be all right, Uncle Francis," whispered Edina with

earnest sympathy, as she crossed the lawn with the Major when he was departing.

"Right in what way, my dear?"

"That you will inherit Eagles' Nest."

"Oh, that *is* all right," replied the Major. "My letter tells me so. Everything is willed to me. Poor Ann!—Good-bye, my dear: be sure you stay until we return.—What a hot walk we shall have of it into Bath!" added the Major, taking off his hat and rubbing his brow in anticipation already. "But there's no help for it; no conveyance of any kind at hand. I'd be glad of Tuppin's van this morning."

Edina stood at the gate, and watched them up the avenue, Charley carrying the black portmanteau. In her steadfast, earnest eyes, there lay a certain expression of *rest*. With her habit of looking forward to the dark side of things as well as the bright, Edina had never felt quite assured upon the point of the Major's inheritance: it was welcome, indeed, to hear that this was placed beyond doubt. What would that improvident, helpless family have done without it!

A hand stole itself within Edina's arm. She turned her soft, dark eyes, to see Mrs. Raynor; who looked, as usual, very mild about the face, and very limp about the dress. The children had rushed indoors again, and were restlessly running from room to room in the excitement of their new prospects, discussing the wonders that would become theirs, now wealth and greatness had fallen to their portion. Their minds were picturing the future residence at Eagles' Nest all gold, and glitter, and gladness: life was to be as one long Lord Mayor's day.

"It is a great strain removed, Edina!"

"What is, Mary?" For Edina had never called this young wife of her uncle's "Aunt." It had been "Mary" from the first. They were not so very many years removed from one another in age.

"All the distress and contriving about money. I have never said much about it, for where was the use: but you don't know what a strain upon the feelings it has been."

"I do," said Edina. "I can only too readily imagine it. For many years the same strain lay on me and papa: at Trennach, and before we went to Trennach. It is removed now in a degree, for the necessity for saving does not exist as it did, but we are careful still. I learnt economical ways in my pinafores, Mary, and shall never forget them. Your children could not understand my coming here in Tuppin's van yesterday, when I might have hired a fly: but it saved five shillings. Papa is given to urge economy upon me still, and to practise it himself. I think he does so for my sake."

"Ah! what *could* you do, Edina, if anything happened to your father, and you were left without the means to live?"

Edina laughed at the consternation expressed in Mrs. Raynor's voice.

To this really helpless woman, the being left without means seemed as the very greatest of all earthly calamities.

"I should have no fear for myself, Mary, I would go out as useful companion ; or plain governess ; or even as housekeeper. Few places of practical usefulness would come amiss to me."

"That's true, I am sure," said Mrs. Raynor.

They were strolling across the grass-plot arm in arm, Mrs. Raynor stooping to pluck a flower here and there : a June rose ; a pink ; a morsel of syringa from amid the shrubs.

"How sweet they are, Edina ! Take them."

"Sweet, indeed ! And I must gather one for myself : a lily-of-the-valley. It is my favourite flower of all flowers."

The lily-of-the-valley picked, they strolled on again. Silence had supervened. Mrs. Raynor was puzzling her brains over the children's mourning : what would, and what would not be necessary, and how it would all get made.

"What are you going to do with Charles ?" suddenly asked Edina.

"With Charles ! I'm sure I don't know. Why, Edina ?"

"It is so sad to see a fine young fellow, as he is, with all his wits and capabilities about him, spending his days in idleness. I had meant to talk to Uncle Francis about it to-day. I do think, Mary, it has been a great mistake."

"Well, dear, perhaps it has," replied the equable woman. "But you see, it takes so much money to bring young men on in life : and we had no money to spare."

"Then, where money lacks, they should be 'brought on' in some way that does not take money," rejoined Edina. "Charles has been absolutely idle ; and only from the want of being directed to be otherwise. Even Frank saw the error. When he returned to us the last time from his short stay here, he said what a pity it was."

"Charles wanted to be a barrister, I fancy. But the Major could not take any steps in it without money."

"Do you know what I should have done, Mary—placed him in a lawyer's office as a temporary clerk, that he might be acquiring some knowledge of law while he was waiting."

"I declare we never thought of that," cried Mrs. Raynor. "Perhaps Charley would not have liked it, though."

"Perhaps not. I should have done it, for all that, had I been Uncle Francis. Nothing in the world is so pernicious to a young man as the acquiring of idle habits. Has Charles been reading law books ?"

"No ; only novels," said Mrs. Raynor.

"And yet the other might have been of great use to him ! It has been just so much precious time wasted, Mary. These opening years of manhood are the best years in a young man's life. I mean as regards the acquirement of knowledge. The faculties are all awake,

and thirsting for it. Later, they get somewhat dulled, and the thirst diminishes."

"Well, it will all be right, Edina, now that he has Eagles' Nest to look forward to. Of course, he could look forward to it before; but the doubt was, when we should come into it. Suppose Mrs. Atkinson had lived to be a hundred years old? Some people do. Where should we all have been then?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Edina, smiling. "Suppose Uncle Francis should live to be a hundred, Mary? Where would Charley be in that case?"

"But, Edina, what would it matter? With a beautiful place like Eagles' Nest, and means to keep it up, the children would always be sure of a home and welcome there. It would be Charley's as much as ours. He ——"

"Oh, mamma! Oh, Edina! What do you think? Papa has gone without his shaving tackle, and without his boots!"

The salutation came from the children; all of them wildly rushing forth again to shout it out. They had been visiting the Major's dressing-room, and discovered that these indispensable articles had been left behind.

"They are his light summer boots, too; those with the long name," said Alice. "He cannot walk about much in any others."

"Dear, dear, dear!" lamented Mrs. Raynor. "He must have put on those tight, patched ones by mistake—and they always blister his heels. How will he be able to get to Bath?"

Eagles' Nest was not large, but it was one of the prettiest places in all Kent. A long, low, ancient house of grey stone, covered in places with ivy. Some of its old-fashioned casements, with their small panes, had been replaced (many people said spoilt) by modern windows of plate-glass, opening to terraces, to undulating lawns, and to beds of brilliant-hued flowers. Few old houses have so gay and cheerful an appearance as this house had: perhaps owing to the large windows and to other improvements. The entrance door stood in the middle, and was approached by three or four broad, low steps. Painted casements of rich and blended colours—blue, pink, violet, amethyst, and gold—threw their lovely tints upon the tessellated pavement of the hall. Rooms opened on either side of it; bright, attractive rooms, that had a very *home* look, in spite of their beauty, with the large windows that let in the joyous sunlight, and outside Venetian blinds to draw down at will. It was altogether a compact, cheery, and most desirable residence; and it was at an easy and convenient distance by rail from London. The estate, in regard to its land, had been well kept up by Mrs. Atkinson. It was worth about two thousand a year; but was capable of improvement.

When Major Raynor and his son arrived there in the course of the afternoon, the Major in some torment touching his heels and his boots, they were received by Mr. Street, the solicitor to the late Mrs. Atkinson. He was brother to Mr. Edwin Street, the acting partner in the Atkinson bank. John Street was the elder of the brothers: a man of sixty now, who was well known in London as a quiet and most respectable practitioner. He was reserved in his manners; not at all what could be called "genial," and rather severe than benevolent; strictly just, but perhaps not generous.

As the fly that brought the Major and his son from the nearest station rattled up, Mr. Street appeared at the hall door: a little man in spectacles, with cold light eyes and very scanty hair.

"I am glad you are come, Major Raynor."

"And I'm sure I'm glad to see that you are," returned the Major, cordially holding out his hand. "I might have found myself in a fog without you. I got your letter this morning."

"We received news of Mrs. Atkinson's death yesterday afternoon; her coachman was sent up to us with the tidings, and I wrote to you at once," observed Mr. Street. "As you are the sole inheritor, save for a few trifling legacies, and also the executor, I thought it well, as I stated in my letter, that you should be here."

"Just so," said the Major. "When did you get here yourself?"

"I came down this morning."

"And I and Charley started off in a scuffle to catch the ten o'clock train—and I came away in my wrong boots, and—and Charley has been laughing at me. You don't know him, Street—my eldest son and heir. Charley, come here, sir, and be introduced to Mr. Street."

Charles Raynor had been looking from the open window. He had never seen so pretty a place before as this one, lying under the June-sunshine. Hay was being made here, just as it had been in Somerset; and the sweet fresh smell came wafted to him on the summer breeze. The lawns were beautifully kept, the flowers were choice; shrubs clustered around, trees waved above. In the distance was spread out a beautiful landscape, than which nothing could have been more pleasing to the eye. Close by, curled the blue smoke from the little village of Grassmere, hidden by the trees from the view of its grand neighbour, Eagles' Nest. Surely in this spot man could find all his heart desired! Charley sighed as he turned in obedience to the call: the lad had a love for the beauties of nature.

"Had this been left to others instead of ourselves, how I should envy them, now that I have seen it!" said Charles to himself. And he was not thinking then of any pecuniary benefit:

Mr. Street looked keenly at him as he turned. He saw a tall, slender, good-looking young man; who, in manner at least, appeared to be somewhat indifferent, not to say haughty.

"A proud young dandy, who thinks the world's made for him," decided the lawyer in his inmost mind.

"In any profession, young sir?" asked Mr. Street.

"Not yet," replied Charles. "I shall have, I expect, to go to college before thinking of one. If I think of one at all."

"Better enter one," said Mr. Street, shortly. "There's no life so pleasant as one that has its regular occupation; none so miserable as one of idleness."

"And that's true," put in the Major. "Since I left the service, I've been like a fish out of water. Sometimes, before the day has well begun I wish it was ended, not knowing what to do with myself."

"Not many weeks ago, Mrs. Atkinson was talking to me about that very thing, Major. She fancied you would have done better not to sell out."

"Ay; I've said so myself. Poor Ann! Poor Ann! I should like to have seen more of her. But she had her crotchets, you know, Street. Did she suffer much at the last, I wonder?"

"No, she went off quite easily, like one who was worn out. She is lying in the red room: I've been up to see her. A good woman; but, as you observe, Major, crotchety on some points."

"Why, would you believe it, Street, she once thought of disinheriting me."

"I know it," replied the lawyer. "And, perhaps," he added, with as much of a smile as ever came near his lips, "you owe it to me that she did not do it."

"Indeed! How was that?"

"I received a letter from her, calling me down here, for the purpose, she said, of altering her will. Away I came, bringing the will with me—for I held one copy of it, as you may remember, Major Raynor, and you the other. 'I want to disinherit my brother,' were the first words she said to me; 'I shall leave Eagles' Nest to George Atkinson: I always wished him to have it.' Of course I asked her the why and the wherefore. 'Francis has affronted me, and he shall not inherit it,' was all the explanation I could get from her. Well, Major, I talked to her, and brought her into a more reasonable frame of mind: and the result was, that I carried the original will back to town with me, untouched and unaltered."

"Poor Ann! poor Ann!" repeated the Major.

"About the arrangements?" resumed Mr. Street. "If I can be of any use to you, Major ——"

"Why, you can be of all the use," interrupted the Major. "I don't know a bit how to manage anything."

Mr. Street had brought the will down with him to-day, and it was deemed right to open it at once. Major Raynor found that the recollection he had retained of its general contents was pretty accurate,

save on one point. Eagles' Nest was left to him as it stood, with all its contents and appurtenances; and he was made residuary legatee: therefore, whatever moneys might have accumulated or been invested in shares, stock, and what not, would become his, after all claims and legacies were paid. The one point on which his memory had not served him, regarded the bequest to Frank Raynor. Instead of its being "among the thousands," as he had confidently believed, and led Frank to believe, it was only among the hundreds. And not very high in them, either. Five hundred pounds. That was its amount: neither more nor less. The Major looked at the amount ruefully.

"I'm sure I can't tell how I came to take up the notion that it was so much more, Charley," said he. "I am very sorry. It will be a disappointment for Frank."

"But can't you make it up to him, father?" suggested Charles. "There must be a great deal of accumulated money, as Mr. Street says: you might spare Frank a little out of it."

"Why, to be sure I can," heartily returned the Major, his eyes beaming. "It did not strike me. But I should have thought of it myself, Charley, later."

"A great deal of accumulated money, regarding it from a moderate point of view," spoke the lawyer, in confirmation. "Mr. Timothy Atkinson left a fairish sum behind him, the interest upon which must have been accumulating until now. And his widow did not, I am sure, live up to anything like the revenues of this estate."

"What is it all invested in?—where's it lying?" asked the Major.

"We must see to that."

"But don't you know?"

"No. Mrs. Atkinson managed her monetary affairs herself, without reference to me. My brother knows all about everything, I dare say; but he is, and always has been, as close as wax."

"Perhaps the money is deposited with him?"

"I think not," said the lawyer. "I know he once, close though he is, said something to the effect that it was not. The securities for it, bonds and vouchers, and so forth, are no doubt lying in his hands."

The funeral took place, Mr. Street again coming down for the ceremony. He was accompanied by his brother, Mr. Edwin Street. Dr. Raynor had declined the invitation sent him: he was not well enough to undertake the long journey; and Frank could not be spared.

Some conversation occurred between the brothers, on the way down, about the above-mentioned securities; but the banker at once said they were not deposited with him. In the after part of the day, when the funeral was over, Lawyer Street mentioned this to Major Raynor, and said they were no doubt "somewhere in the house."

A thorough search ensued: old Mrs. Atkinson's maid, an elderly and

partially confidential attendant of many years, taking part in it. She showed them every possible place of security, locked and unlocked, in which such deeds could be placed. But none were found.

"I still think they must be in your strong boxes at the bank," observed the lawyer to his brother, as he and Major Raynor returned to the room where they had left Mr. Edwin Street and Charles.

"But I assure you they are not," replied the banker, who bore a good deal of resemblance to his brother, and had the same cold manner. "When Mrs. Atkinson made her will, she lodged with us certain bonds of India Stock, just about sufficient to pay the legacies she bequeathed in that will when the time should come—as it now has come. She told me that she intended the stock to be applied to that purpose. We hold the bonds still; and the interest, which we have regularly received for her, has been added to her current account with us: but we hold no other securities."

"What an odd thing!" cried the Major. "Where can they be?"

"When our second partner, Mr. Timothy Atkinson, died," continued the banker, "he left a certain sum in the bank to his wife's account, upon which she was to receive substantial interest. But in about a year, I think it was, she withdrew this sum, and invested it elsewhere."

"Where? What in?"

"I cannot tell. I never knew. I understood from her that it was invested; but I knew no more. We have never had any money of hers since—except of course the current account, paid in from the revenues of this estate. And we hold no securities of hers, besides these that I have spoken of, the Indian bonds."

"Was the sum she withdrew a large one?" asked the Major.

"It was between fourteen and fifteen thousand pounds."

"And she must have added ever so much on to that," observed the lawyer. "She has not lodged her superfluous income with you?" he added to his brother.

"No. I have said so. We hold nothing but her current account. That has been replenished by her when necessary; but we have had nothing more. It is certainly strange where the vouchers for her property can be. I suppose," added the banker more slowly, "that she did not invest the money in some bubble scheme, and lose it?"

"The very same thought was crossing my mind," spoke his brother.

"But, you don't think that probable, do you, Street?" cried Major Raynor, turning rather hot.

A pause ensued. Lawyer Street was evidently thinking the probabilities out. They waited, and watched him.

"I must confess that circumstances look suspicious," he said at length. "Else why so much secrecy?"

"Secrecy?"

"Yes. If Mrs. Atkinson placed the money in any well-known safe

investment, why was she not open about it: get me to act for her, and lodge the securities at the bank? She did neither: she acted for herself—as we must suppose—and kept the transaction to herself. The inference is, that it was some wild-goose venture that she did not care to speak of. Women are *so* credulous."

"What a gloomy look out!" put in the Major.

"Oh, well, we have only been glancing at possibilities, you know," observed Mr. Street. "I daresay the securities will be found—and the money also."

"Right, John," assented the banker. "Had Mrs. Atkinson found her money was being lost, she would assuredly have set you to work to recover it. I think we may safely assume that much, Major Raynor?"

CHAPTER XV.

UNEXPECTED COMMOTION.

"Be sure you stay until we return," had been the charge left to Edina Raynor by her uncle. But the Major found himself detained longer than he had thought for, and she went away from Spring Lawn without again seeing him or Charles.

During the short period of her absence from Trennach—nine days—her father had changed so much that she started inwardly when she saw him. As he came out of his house to welcome her, all Edina's pulses stood still for a moment, and then coursed onwards with a bound. In a gradual, wasting illness, not very apparent to the eyes around, it is only on such an occasion as this that its inroads can be judged of.

"Papa, you have been ill!"

"True, Edina. But I am mending somewhat now."

"Why did you not send for me?"

"Nay, my dear, there was not any necessity."

A substantial tea-table had been spread, and in a very few minutes Edina was presiding at it; her travelling things off, her soft brown hair smoothed, her countenance wearing its usual cheerful gravity. Not a gravity that repelled: one that insensibly attracted, for it spoke of its owner's truth, and faith, and earnestness, of her goodwill to all about her. Sitting there, dispensing her cups of tea to the Doctor and Frank, she was ready to hear the news of all that had transpired in the village during her absence.

Nearly the first item that greeted her was the stir about Josiah Bell—of which she had previously heard nothing. It had not subsided in the least, but rather increased: the man missing so long was now supposed to be lying in the deep shaft. But supposition could only be traced back to a very insecure source indeed: nothing more than a dream of Mr. Blase Pellet's.

"A dream!" exclaimed Edina, in the midst of her listening wonder.

"So Pellet says," replied Dr. Raynor.

"But, papa, can there be any foundation for it? I mean the fact: not the dream?"

"The very question that we all asked when the rumour arose, Edina. At first it could not be traced to any source at all: there was the report, but whence it came seemed to be a mystery. One said, You told me; the other said, No, I heard it from you. At last, by dint of some close and patient investigation, chiefly on the part of the publican, Float, it was traced back to Blase Pellet. And he said he dreamt it."

"Then, after all, it has no foundation," cried Edina.

"None but that. I questioned Pellet myself: asking him how he came to spread such a report. He replied that he did not spread the report that Bell was lying there, only that he dreamt he was."

"I should have thought Blase Pellet a very unlikely man to have dreams, papa."

"So should I," assented the Doctor in a significant tone. "So unlikely, that I cannot help suspecting he did not have this one."

Frank Raynor, who had risen to stand at the window, as if attracted by something in the street, turned his head half round at this remark, but immediately turned it back again. Edina looked inquiringly at her father.

"I could not help fancying, as I listened to him, that Pellet was saying it for some purpose," observed the Doctor. "His manner was peculiar. If I may so describe it—shuffling."

"I scarcely understand you, papa. You think he did not have the dream? That he only said he had it; and said it for a purpose?"

"Just so, Edina."

"But what could be his purpose?"

"Ah, there I am at fault. We may discover later. If he did say it with a purpose, I conclude it will not end here."

"Well, it sounds rather strange altogether," observed Edina. "Frank, do you mean to let your tea get quite cold?"

Frank Raynor returned to his place at the table. He drank his tea, but declined to eat; and began to speak of Mrs. Atkinson's will.

"Did you hear any particulars about it, Edina?"

"No," replied Edina. "Except the one fact that she did not make a second will. There were doubts upon the point, you know."

"Uncle Francis never entertained any doubt of it, Edina. And he was the best judge, I think, of what his sister would, or would not do. I am very glad though, for his and Charley's sake."

"For all their sakes," added Edina.

"I rather wonder we have not heard from him," resumed Frank. "The funeral took place three or four days ago."

"You were not able to go to it, papa?" said Edina.

"No, child. Neither could Frank be spared. It would have taken three days, you see, to go and return comfortably."

Rising from the tea table as soon as he could make a decent excuse for it, for he had no business calls on his time this evening, Frank set off on his usual walk to the Mount. Five evenings, since Edina left, had he so gone; but never with any success: not once had Daisy come out to him. She was being watched closer than ever.

"And I suppose I shall have my walk for nothing this evening also!" thought Frank, as he plucked a wild rose from one of the fragrant roadside hedges. "This shall not go on long: but I should like to present myself to Mrs. St. Clare with an assured sum in hand to start us in life. I wonder Uncle Francis does not write! He must know I am anxious—if he thinks about it. Up to his ears in his new interests, he forgets other people's."

Fortune favoured Frank this evening. As he approached the outer gate of the Mount, he saw Daisy standing at it, very much to his surprise.

"Mamma's lawyer has come over on business, and she is shut up with him," began Daisy, her eyes dancing with delight. "She told me to go to Lydia. But Lydia is asleep, and I came out here."

"I have wanted to see you so much, Daisy," said Frank, as he gave her his arm, and they turned off under the broad elm trees. "My aunt, Mrs. Atkinson, is dead."

"We saw it in the papers," answered Daisy.

"It is from her that I expect money, you know. Every day I look for a letter from my Uncle Frank, telling me what sum it is that I inherit. And then I shall present myself to your mother. I have so longed to tell you this."

"I have longed to see you," returned Daisy, her pulses beating wildly with various and very mixed feelings, her face flushing and paling. "I—I—I want to ask you something, Frank."

"Ask away, my love," was his reply. But he noticed her emotion.

"Perhaps you will not answer me?"

"Indeed I will, Daisy. Why not?"

"It is about—Rosaline Bell." She could scarcely get the words out for agitation.

Frank was startled. It was quite evident that he was unprepared for any such topic. It seemed to *frighten* him. Else why that sudden change of countenance, that sudden drop of Daisy's arm? Her heart fell.

"What of her?" asked Frank, quite sharply. For in truth he believed Daisy was about to question him, not of Rosaline herself, but of that mysterious rumour connected with her father and the Bottomless Shaft; and it grated on him terribly.

"I see it is true," gasped Daisy. "Oh! why did you marry *me*?"

"What is true?" returned Frank, unpleasantly agitated.

"That you—that you—were fond of Rosaline Bell. You loved her all along. Before you loved me!"

The charge was so very different from what he had been fearing, that Frank felt for the moment bewildered: bewildered in the midst of his inexpressible relief. He stood still, turned Daisy so that she faced him, and gazed into her eyes.

"What is it that you say, my dear? I don't understand."

Daisy shook and shivered, but did not speak.

"That I love Rosaline Bell? I never loved her. What in the world put such an idea in your head?"

For answer Daisy burst into tears. "She—she was so beautiful!"

"Beautiful! Of course she is beautiful. And I admired her beauty, Daisy, if it comes to that, as much as other people did. But as to loving Rosaline Bell, that is a mistake. I never felt a spark of love for her. What a goose you must be, Daisy!—And why on earth should you have taken up the fancy just now?"

Daisy sobbed too much to answer. She nearly believed what he said, for no doubt lay in his earnest tone, and suffered herself to be soothed. She would have quite believed it, but for Frank's signs of discomfiture at the introduction of the girl's name. Frank held her to him as they walked underneath the trees, and kissed her tear-stained face from time to time.

"You need not doubt my love, Daisy. That at least is yours."

They parted more hopefully than usual, for Frank assured her it could not be above a day or two ere he claimed her openly; and Daisy felt that she might believe him in all respects; and she resolutely flung aside her jealousy.

"Fare you well, my darling. A short while now—we may count it by the hours—and all this will be over."

He went home by way of the Bare Plain. And by so doing—and it was not very often now he chose that route—fell into an adventure he had not bargained for. Round and about the Bottomless Shaft had collected a crowd of men, who were making much commotion.

It appeared that the rumours, touching Josiah Bell, had this night reached what might be called a climax. Miners had gone off from various quarters to the alleged scene of Mr. Blase's dream, and were plunging into the mystery *con amore*. As many as could press around the pit's mouth were holding on to one another for safety, and hanging dangerously over it: as if by that means they could solve the problem of who and what might be lying within. Others stood at a distance, making free comments, momentarily taking their pipes out of mouth to speak. Mrs. Bell, getting to hear of the stir, had tied a white-spotted yellow silk square (once Josiah's Sunday-going handkerchief) over her cap, and come out to make one of the throng. It was a very light and hot night, daylight scarcely gone, and the western sky bright

with a pale amber. The rugged faces of the miners and the red glow from their pipes, coupled with the commotion that stirred them, made a strange scene:

"Are you here, Mrs. Bell!" cried Frank, as he discerned her on the outskirts of the crowd. "What is it that is the matter?"

"There's nothing the matter," interposed Blase Pellet. And Frank turned on his heel to face the speaker in the moment's impulse, for he had not known that he was there. "What the plague all the town has come out for like this, I can't think. Let them mind their own business."

"But we consider that it is our business, don't you see, Blase," put in Andrew Float in his civil way. "Our poor vanished mate is either lying down there in they stones and ashes, or he isn't; and we'd like to make sure which it were."

"Well, then, he is *not*," returned Blase: and he disappeared amid the throng.

"Has anything fresh arisen?" inquired a quiet voice at this juncture—that of Dr. Raynor—addressing both Frank and Mrs. Bell, who were standing side by side. The Doctor, observing from his window a great number of people, evidently in excitement, making for the Bare Plain, had come forth himself to learn what the movement meant.

"I can't find out that there's anything fresh, sir," was the dame's answer. "Amid such confusion one don't easily get to the bottom of things. Andrew Float says 'twas just a thought that took 'em as they sat over their cups at the Golden Shaft—that they'd come off and have a look down the pit's mouth; and others, seeing them, followed. But I'd hardly think anything so simple could have brought all these."

"They must have had some reason for coming," remarked the Doctor, gazing at the ever-increasing crowd.

"Blase Pellet has just said there is no reason," rejoined Frank. "I should advise you not to stand out here long," he added, to Mrs. Bell.

"Blase Pellet's nobody to go by: he'll say one thing to-day, and another to-morrow," hastily rejoined Dame Bell; as she turned on the path that led to her home; they turning with her.

"I think the dreams, that he says he has, are not much to go by," observed Dr. Raynor quietly.

"Oh, but that dream was," said Dame Bell. "And I've never had a good night's rest, sir, since I heard it, and that's more than a week ago. I can't get to sleep at night for thinking of it."

"I am sorry to hear you say so, Mrs. Bell: I thought you had better sense. Pellet must have been very foolish to tell you of it."

"'Twasn't him that did tell me, Dr. Raynor. Leastways, not off-hand. It was Nancy Tomson. She come into my place one morning when I was down on my knees after breakfast whitening the hearth-flag; and I saw how scared her face looked, sir. 'Guess what they

be saying now,' says she to me : 'they've got a tale that your husband is a lying in the Bottomless Shaft.' Well, sir, I stared at her, sitting back, as I knelt, with the piece of stone in my hand : for you see I thought she meant he was lying there asleep ; I thought no worse. 'Go along with you, Nancy,' says I ; 'as if Bell would lie himself down to sleep near that shaft !' 'Oh, it's not near it, but *in* it,' says she ; 'and it's not sleeping he is, but dead. Anyway,' she goes on, seeing I didn't believe her, 'it's what they men be saying.' Well, Doctor, though I found every soul in the place saying the same thing, for four-and-twenty hours I could not get to learn why they said it. Andrew Float told me at last. He said it was through a dream of Blase Pellet's."

Dr. Raynor, listening attentively, made no comment.

"I got Pellet before me, sir, and he made a clean breast of it. He had not intended to let me know it, he said—and I don't think he had : but I did know it, and so it was no use his holding out. It was a dreadful dream, he said. He had seen my poor husband lying at the bottom of that deep shaft, dead : seen him as plain as he had ever seen anything in all his life. When he woke up, he was all in a hot horror, his hair standing on end."

"Ah," said the Doctor quietly, his tone one of utter disbelief, though Mrs. Bell did not detect it. "Did he intimate, pray, how long Bell had been lying there?"

"It was what I asked him, sir, when I could get my breath together. A good three months, he was sure, he said : which must have brought it back, sir, you see to the time he disappeared."

"Yes, I do see," observed the Doctor, rather pointedly. "Well, I put no faith in dreams, Mrs. Bell, and I would advise you to put none. Good night. Get indoors as soon as you can."

Dr. Raynor turned homewards, making a circuit to avoid the throng. Frank began whistling softly to himself, as a man sometimes does when absorbed in thought.

"What is your opinion of this, Frank?" asked the Doctor, abruptly.

"I can form none, sir. Why they should collect ——"

"Not that," interrupted the Doctor. "One fool makes many. I spoke of Blase Pellet's alleged dream. I, myself, believe he had nothing of the kind : but what puzzles me is, his motive for saying that he had. Some men are gifted with a propensity for astounding their fellow-creatures with marvellous tales. To create a sensation they'd say they have been hung, drawn, quartered, and brought to life again. But Pellet is not one of these : he is quiet, reticent, and practical."

Frank made no answering observation. They were nearly abreast now of the Bottomless Shaft, and of the crowd surging around it.

"I could almost think that he *knows* Bell is in there," resumed the Doctor, dropping his voice. "That he must have been privy to the

accident—if it was an accident—that sent poor Bell down. Perhaps took part in it —— ”

“Oh, no, no ! It is not likely he would take part in anything of the kind, Uncle Hugh.”

“If I don’t quite think it, it is because there are one or two stumbling-blocks in the way,” went on Dr. Raynor with composure, and paying no heed to the interruption. “Had Pellet been a witness to any accident—any false slip of Bell’s, for instance, on the edge of the pit—he would have spoken of it at the time. Had he taken any part in it—inadvertently, say, for I don’t think Pellet would do so willingly—and hushed it up, he would not be likely to invent a dream now, and so draw attention again to what had nearly died away. Nevertheless, I am sure there is something or other in this new stir of Mr. Pellet’s that does not appear on the surface.”

Dr. Raynor quitted the subject, to the intense relief of his nephew ; took off his hat in the warm night, and began to talk of the evening star, shining before them in all its brilliancy.

“A little while, Frank, a few more poor weeks, or months, or years, given to the fret and tare of this earthly life, and we shall, I suppose, know what these stars are ; shall have entered on our heavenly life hereafter.”

Major Raynor’s expected letter came to Frank on the following morning. As he opened it, a bank-note for £20 dropped out : which the generous-hearted Major had sent as an earnest of his goodwill.

“MY DEAR BOY,—I am sorry to have to tell you that the legacy left you by your Aunt Ann is only five hundred pounds. I confess that I thought it would have turned out to be at least three thousand. Of course I shall make it up to you. We cannot yet put our hands upon the securities for the accumulated money ; but as soon as we do so, you shall have a cheque from me for three thousand pounds.

“I hope my brother is better, and Edina well. I wish she could be at Spring Lawn to help in the packing up, and all the rest of it. They come up to Eagles’ Nest next week : and how they will get away without Edina to start them, I cannot think. My best affection to all.

“Ever your attached uncle,

“FRANCIS RAYNOR.”

“I wonder how it is,” mused Frank, as he slowly folded the letter, “that in all our needs and necessities and troubles, we instinctively turn to Edina?”

(*To be continued.*)

PRINCESS ELEANOR.

I.

MUNICH, September, 186—.

MY dear Geoffrey,—When we rambled together through Italy, from the snow of the Alps and the fires of Mount Vesuvius to the iceborn waters of the Po, you often joked me on my shyness and reserve, and declared me incapable of appreciating female loveliness. For not the fiery eyes of the Venetian; not the thinly veiled snowy neck of the fair daughters of Milan; not even the proud profile of the Roman, could allure your bashful friend. While you, like a butterfly, flitted from flower to flower, I had eyes only for the forms of beauty of ages long past.

Oh, Geoffrey, how changed is all this! My hour has come at last—the ideal of my soul has appeared to me.

But hear it all from the beginning. I had spent more than a week in the halls of the Crystal Palace at Munich, visiting the collection of fine arts there exhibited: happy in admiring the best productions of nearly half a century. With one lingering look I was taking leave of Schwind's "Seven Ravens," when suddenly I was interrupted in my contemplation by a voice, expressing admiration of the rare piece of art before me. I looked up and perceived a young lady, standing by the side of a gentleman in the full vigour of manhood. So melodious had that voice sounded, that I remained rooted to the spot, apparently intent on the picture, until she should turn her whole face towards me. Geoffrey, I cannot tell you how those features moved all the innermost fibres of my heart! Dark blue eyes full of soul, a pure high forehead, a noble mouth, the beauty of her person such as leads one to imagine that so much loveliness can only be mated with all perfection of mind and heart; a figure rare in its proportions, every attitude a Venus of Milo.

Call me an enthusiast if you like, but I must confess that this thought struck me: This will be my death, if it be not vouchsafed to me to share her lot! And as yet I knew not whether her companion were father, brother or husband! The fear of losing her without a trace to find her again, made me forgetful of good manners and discretion. I drew out my pocket-book, and with a few hasty lines sketched her portrait, impressing every feature in my memory, so as to be able to render it again. How inadequately does my pencil reproduce such beauty! It happened, as I had feared. While a friend was detaining me, the strangers left the room, and by the time I had wound myself through the crowd at the door, their carriage had taken them beyond reach.

For a whole week I stood sentinel at the Exhibition ; but they never came again. I visited the theatres every evening, inquired at every hotel, walked from the galleries to the studios of Kaulbach and Piloty—all in vain. I saw her no more. But her image is graven for ever in my heart. Hear what I have decided upon.

I must paint a great work of art, for the model of which I shall draw upon my memory, and the sketch I have made ; and with the aid of this picture I must find her again, even should I be obliged to exhibit it in every capital of Europe.

Good-bye, Geoffrey. Think sometimes of the miseries of
Your friend, *WALTER.*

II.

My dear Geoffrey,—Victory ! My plan has been successful ! I have found her again—she is still free !

But with all that I am the unhappiest of mortals !

Listen, Geoffrey, and pity me, for I am beyond help or advice.

It is now a full year since I first saw her, and not for one day has her image faded from my heart. During the winter I completed my picture. It is painted with all the ardour of my soul, in the highest flight of my fancy, with the whole passion of my nature, with the minute care of a lover, and—I may say it—it is the best I have ever done.

I have painted her in the character of "Snowdrop." Ever since last Easter the picture has been exhibited, first at Munich, then at Dresden, Berlin, Frankfort. The resemblance is, if I can judge aright, quite striking, and therefore had I hoped that the object of all my yearning would recognise herself, or that some friend of hers would question me as to its identity. I watched like an Argus, from morning till night, killing time with making copies and pencil sketches. More than thirty persons had applied for the purchase of my picture, but of course I refused every offer.

At last I sent the "Snowdrop" to the Rhenish Art Exhibition, and accompanied it to Cologne. One day as I was sitting in a window recess, with a pencil, drawing on my knees, I heard a manly voice asking one of the attendants for the inspector.

"He has gone out, Sir."

"Then possibly you can tell me where the picture is that lately excited so much the admiration of her Majesty?"

"Perhaps you mean the 'Snowdrop'? It is close by."

"Pray show it to us, my good man." I heard steps and the rustling of a lady's dress, and after a while the same voice, said :

"The Queen is right. It is, indeed, a remarkable resemblance. How strange ! Do you know, my good fellow, whether the picture is sold or not?"

"It is not sold, but the artist does not wish to sell it; I believe he is an eccentric person. He has already refused the handsomest offers."

"Can you give me his address?"

"He spends most of his time here—Oh, there he is!"

That exclamation brought me to my feet. The next instant I stood before them, but speechless. Once more I beheld the object of all my hopes and wishes, on the arm of the same gentleman in whose company I had first seen her at Munich.

The man, who after long imprisonment is for the first time taken into the light of the sun, may feel as I did at that moment.

My whole soul seemed to be passing out at my eyes; I felt like another being.

The stranger broke silence by saying:

"I am happy to know the author of this splendid work of art. I have a great wish to purchase it."

"I am sorry," I stammered, after a pause, "but I do not intend to sell it."

"Do you know, my dear Sir, that I shall not let you off so easily. I find a resemblance in the picture, which does not seem to rest on mere chance. If you refuse me an explanation you will not find it easy to refuse it my sister. I leave you to fix your own terms."

"Pray, do!" I heard the melodious voice say, whose tones never fail to reach my heart. Still I stood firm.

"Will not a copy suffice?" I asked.

"No. But that suggests an alternative to me. Who may have served as model for this picture, I know not; but choose a similar subject to this, and my sister will sit for it. We pass the winter in Berlin, and it would suit us best if you could set to work there. All the conditions I leave you to determine."

"I should consider it a great honour," I replied, scarcely knowing what I said.

"Then we are agreed. Towards the end of autumn you will find us in Berlin. Here is my card."

Whilst the speaker was taking his card out, I tried to say a few words to the lady, but something about her, at once gentle and proud, rendered me so timid that I could not for all the world have found the right thing to utter. By the time I had stammered some incomprehensible words, the gentleman had put his card into my hand, and bowing, left the room with his companion. I stood looking after them with open mouth, until my eye caught the card in my hand.

I read the inscription, and in my terror let it fall to the ground. This was the name it bore—

Ernest, Prince Waldenberg.

Farewell, golden dream of love! Farewell, Geoffrey! Either you

will hear no word of me for a long time, or you will soon clasp me bodily to your heart.

Shall I keep my rashly given promise?

Yours, WALTER.

III.

Dearest Amelia,—Have you already condemned me beyond mercy, or am yet I in time to plead my own cause?

What on earth could have made me promise to write every evening? If I try to describe a single day, you will say that for once breaking your word is no crime.

At nine we breakfast; after which Ernest goes regularly to the Reichstag, and I get ready for my masters. Singing, music, languages, fill up the morning. After lunch, I accompany my brother to studios and galleries; sometimes we pay visits or take a drive; I scarcely find time to dress for dinner. After dinner we either see a few friends at home, or else go to a theatre, a concert, or some small party. Balls have not as yet begun. When at last we return, Ernest expects me to play to him; he is kind enough to call that his recreation; and so it is usually very late indeed before I can get back to my own room. Were I then to write letters they would only be dreary epistles, as unpleasant to you to read as the writer to pen. I shall have plenty of time to tell you all when I return to Heiligen Stein next summer, where I should heartily wish I were now if I did not know that Ernest is happy to have me with him. But I will write you all important news, and if to-day's post is but a poor one, do not fear; there will be plenty of subjects to enlarge upon by-and-by.

One piece of news I must not forget to tell you: your wish to have my portrait will be fulfilled. Listen in how wonderful a way.

A short time ago we were told that in the Rhenish Exhibition there was a picture, a masterpiece of modern art, which so much resembled me, that even the queen herself thought it was a portrait of me. I went with Ernest to see it, although he thought what had been said a fable. He thinks with you, that Eleanor has not her equal in all the world. But there, the picture was Eleanor, Princess Waldemberg, in real life, perhaps a little idealized, attired in the simple dress of a "snow-drop!"

I am not sure whether Ernest was more vexed or delighted. He inquired for the artist, intending to buy the beautiful picture.

A young man was pointed out to us, who happened to be in the gallery; a tall, fair, handsome, blue-eyed youth, with that dreamy expression of countenance which we fancy peculiar to artists. His decided refusal to let us have the picture disclosed, however, firmness of character. The resemblance he did not choose to explain. Either he cleverly pretended not to know what Ernest meant, when he

alluded to it, or else he did not understand him. He has something peculiarly shy and reserved about him.

It is not Ernest's way to give up a thing he has set his mind upon. When he saw that the young man would on no account part with his picture, he proposed that he should paint another, taking me for his model. To this the artist agreed, and we told him that he would shortly find us at Berlin.

Perhaps I should have forgotten the whole affair had not Ernest continually spoken of it, and even insisted upon my having a dress made, similar to the one worn by the Snowdrop of the picture.

Yesterday the artist came for the first time, and I found that his name is Walter Impach. He must have moved little in society, for his embarrassed manner reminds me of the sensitive plant in your conservatory, that shrinks as soon as it is touched.

After some conversation, Ernest took Herr Impach over the house to enable him to choose a room for his studio. Last of all we visited the gallery, where the artist went into ecstasies over our collection, and called the Rembrandts "quite invaluable"! You know how fond Ernest is of his pictures, and can fancy that the young man thus drew himself into favour without knowing it.

I was told to show my dress, which the artist approved of. Then he left us, promising to come next day, at the hour Ernest had appointed. When we were alone my brother and I continued to speak of Herr Impach for some time. Ernest said that he was much too modest for an artist, and had he not seen the picture he should have fancied Herr Impach to be but a beginner. I could not understand Ernest's meaning, for was it not natural that the artist who for the first time in his life entered a house like ours, should feel shy, especially in Ernest's somewhat imposing presence? But my brother said: "An artist of genius thinks himself *every one's* equal!"

This morning the first sitting. When I entered the studio—it is thus we call the small room Herr Impach has chosen for his work—all was ready. A strong scent of turpentine pervaded the apartment. As I appeared at the door in my white dress, Mr. Impach started up from his seat, and stared me full in the face. No bow, no "good morning;" all that came a good while after.

I sat down; but now began the real trouble. After a few strokes on the canvas, Mr. Impach declared that my hair was not at all suitable. That to me! I had a looking-glass brought, and destroyed all Fanny's elaborate work. But to please this child of art was more than I was able. At last I exclaimed impatiently: "Arrange it yourself, then!" Scarcely had I said the words, when a thought of the strange hand that would touch me struck me and I repented. But it was done, and Eleanor must abide by her word.

I felt two trembling hands scarcely touching my head, then heard

Mr. Impach say, as he went back to his canvas, that he was totally incapable of producing the effect he wished. Very impolite that sounded ! Still, there was something in the tone that prevented my feeling vexed. I laughed and called Fanny, and in a few moments they understood each other ; for Herr Impach drew a small sketch on the edge of the canvas, and Fanny cleverly executed it.

Before she had finished, the artist was hard at work.

When first I saw how reserved and shy Mr. Impach was, I felt pleased at the idea that during the sittings I should not be troubled by tedious conversation. And after all it was I who broke the silence.

I began by asking him which picture he preferred in all our collection.

"I can only tell that when I have seen it a second time," he answered. "I had proposed to ask permission to do so to-day!"

"Of course the gallery is always open to you. When you go, pray look at the picture which is my favourite—the Weeping Girl—in the corner of the middle room. It is quite a masterpiece."

"I remarked it yesterday. It is a pretty subject ; but done at a time when good pictures were scarce. It is a mannered, French painting."

I was displeased with this answer, and so we were again silent, until after a time, he begged me to open my eyes, which I had half-closed during my reverie. Having been so inattentive, I owed him some courtesy ; I asked him, therefore, if he drew nothing but portraits.

"Quite the contrary," he said, "this is my first portrait."

"And the other—Snowdrop?"

"Was a mere fancy composition."

When he recommended me a little repose, I asked him to come with me into the gallery, where we could rest while admiring the old masterpieces.

Our steps soon directed us to the Rembrandt-room, which Mr. Impach never ceases to praise. He asked me to examine one of the pictures closely, and made me remark the apparently coarse work, which renders the picture very similar to a dirty palette. Then he took me a few steps away. Every stroke, every patch of colour had its significance ; all was harmony, beauty. I had never remarked these things so much before, and conclude it must have been Mr. Impach's enthusiastic admiration that made me see so many fresh beauties in the picture. My own eyes certainly never would have discovered so much. I wished Ernest had been present. How delighted he would have been !

After a while I went to the centre of the room, where, as you know, stands a beautiful copy of the Wounded Boy carried by the Dolphin—the only piece of sculpture attributed to Raphael. Laying my hand on the pretty boy's forehead, I looked up at Mr. Impach, and said :

"I have admired Rembrandt with you, but it is here I pay the greater veneration. Your art is but patchwork, when compared with the life, the reality produced by sculpture."

I felt sure, Amelia, I had said something very clever, and I had spoken in a pretentious tone. You should have seen the young artist's astonished look.

After a short pause, and pressed for an answer by my questioning looks, he said :

"Am I to understand, that you compare painting and sculpture with each other? That you prefer the latter to the former? You cannot be in earnest! Your good taste, your artistic mind cannot thus lead you astray. Some favourite may for the moment influence your judgment—and I must confess that this boy is a fine piece of art—although I do not believe that Raphael ever laid hands on it."

I stood astonished at his words, which seemed to admit of no contradiction. But I would not give in so soon.

"I cannot help *loving* a statue more than a canvas. To touch this boy's forehead, to lay my hand upon his arm, allows me doubly to enjoy this work of art. Painting compared with sculpture is monotonous."

"What is holiest to us is not made for the touch of the hand," said the artist in a strangely moved tone. "For highest perfection we look upwards. As to the monotony of painting, you forget that the brush has all the world at its disposal, from the glow of the sinking sun on the summit of the Alps to the sparkle in a beautiful eye. The chisel can produce men and animals, nothing more—it may not touch the eye; and what is a human head without the eye? It may be pleasing to the senses, never to the mind. It is as you say—made to be touched."

Was this not going too far, Amelia! To use my own words against me! Still I was persuaded that I had been wrong in my opinion, and tried to find words which admitted this in not too generous a way, when a visitor was announced.

Although Count Werdan is a general favourite in the family, his visit was less welcome than usual at this particular moment. I could not tell why myself. He is an intimate friend of my brother's, a clever, lively young man, and to me all kindness and attention.

He had scarcely entered, when a bouquet of violets was in my hands, a complimentary salutation sounded in my ears.

"I come from your brother," he said, "who gave me permission to watch the first steps that Snowdrop has made to-day."

"Then you come in vain," I answered, "for not a living creature besides my brother and cousin Dorothy with her embroidery, will pass the threshold of the studio until the picture is completed. I will, however, give myself the pleasure of presenting to you its author."

When I had pronounced the artist's name I stopped, thinking that I had done enough. What was it that with irresistible force induced me to open my lips again, and also present the Count to the artist?

The Count had much to tell me about a party that had been given the night before, and which I had not chosen to attend.

Save in the misfortune of my absence, a delightful little fête. The Baronne d'O. sang beautifully. Mdlle. Ardorf was prettier than ever. "Do you know that your brother has asked me to dine here the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes. I know also that you are to ride Ali, who has enjoyed freedom so long, that he will not hear of anything in the way of reins. If nothing important keeps me from doing so, I shall come with you all, even at the cost of having to hurry my toilet for the ball afterwards. See what honour I do to your far-famed horsemanship."

"I shall ride my best! But you must promise me a bravo from your ruby lips!"

"Deserve it, before you claim it."

The artist had stood aside, absorbed in the contemplation of a picture. Of course our conversation could not interest him, as he does not take part in our amusements. I asked him whether we should continue our work, and on his agreeing, I dismissed the Count, and returned to the studio, where cousin Dorothy sweetly slumbered in an arm-chair.

Listening to her monotonous discourse is no very pleasant thing, so I took care to speak in whispers, not to disturb the good old soul's repose. Mr. Impach answered in the same tone. He told me that he can paint me far better when I speak, as a natural expression of countenance is in that case more easily obtained.

All at once he asked me if I had ever learnt to draw?

"A little," was my answer; "but masters and copies are so pedantic. I never could find any pleasure in copying Hubert's landscapes."

"Have you never tried to copy any object before you—a flower, a piece of furniture, anything?"

"Never! Do you think I should be able to do so? I am not fond of being a dauber! Still I will try, and not be unhappy if I do not obtain a brilliant result. What shall I do?—let me see—my left hand!"

I tried to give my hand a position in which to draw it would not be over difficult. The artist silently watched me; at last he said in a whisper:—"Do not draw your hand."

"Why? Is it too difficult?"

"Not more difficult than many other things. But what does it matter if you draw a flower massively that ought to be light, or make corners to an inkstand that in reality is round? Whilst your hand—"

Here he broke off. What does he mean? Does he want to defend

my own hand against the distorted image I should make of it? Confess, Amelia, that he is a strange man.

Soon after that we brought the sitting to a close, and Herr Impach asked if he might return to-morrow?

"Of course. Shall I show my brother the beginning of your work?" I said, walking up to the easel.

"Pray do not even look at it yourself—not until to-morrow afternoon. Do not show it to any one," he answered hesitatingly.

"Very well, I will not. But why?"

"Because I should have to explain so many things. I should have to say why this is so and that otherwise, and very likely not be understood in the end. You will not look at the picture, nor show it to any one?"

"I have promised," I could not refrain from answering in an injured tone, so loudly that Cousin Dorothy started up.

As I was leaving the room with a nod of the head, I saw Herr Impach gazing after me with the most pitiable expression of countenance. What was it to me after all? Still I looked round, and went out, saying in a friendly tone: "To-morrow, then!"

Into how long a letter has this grown! Good-bye, my dear Amelia, I shall write again as soon as there is anything interesting to relate.

I am sitting at my little table in my snowdrop dress, my hair arranged as this morning, which is very becoming. Perhaps I shall wear it so until the picture is finished.

Good night, my Amelia—you to whom I whisper all my most secret thoughts!

YOUR ELEANOR.

P.S.—What if I availed myself of the artist's good taste, and consulted him as to the toilet I am to wear at the ball?

IV.

Scarcely four days have passed since my last letter, dear Amy. I have not yet received an answer, and yet I must write to you again, for I have much to tell that has happened in the last few days.

The ball given by Ernest in honour of my birthday was a great success. It was in some measure the opening of the season, as there had not yet been dancing anywhere. I acted the lady of the house, with cousin Dorothy at my side, and I seem to have done well, for as soon as our guests were gone, Ernest kissed me. Directly afterwards he put me from him again, saying:

"Let me glance at you, for I believe you never looked better in your life. How did you happen to think of dressing so artistically?"

That is what I must tell you, Amy. I asked Herr Impach's opinion as to what I should wear, and he promised to consider the important

question. He held a consultation with Fanny, and the result was what I have written. In what the change really consisted of is difficult to say. Something suppressed in one place, something added in another, a ribbon, a few flowers in the hair; but all this not dictated by a moment's caprice; no—systematically, artistically done.

But I, who wished to relate everything in good order, have begun where I should have ended.

The day before yesterday Ernest came into the studio to look at the picture for the first time. I also had not seen it until then.

Fancy how astonished we were when we saw no trace of the first work of art—conception, manner, all was totally new, and to *me* seemed even better than in the former picture. I waited impatiently to hear what Ernest would say. After a long contemplation his eye sought the artist, who stood preparing his palette in a corner of the room. He went up to him, pressed his hand, and said:

"You are a true artist! This second work, if achieved as it is begun, must surpass the first. You have my hearty congratulation!"

Then Ernest explained to me all the beauties of the picture, and the artist listened, pleased, I suppose, to be so well understood. Before he went, Ernest invited him to dinner for the next day, the day on which our ball was to take place.

I had expected the artist to refuse, for he has told me that he leads a most retired life. To my great astonishment he accepted with pleasure.

Yesterday, when I entered the room where Ernest with his friends was waiting for me, I had entirely forgotten the young artist. Count Werdan excused his velvet coat, pleading that Ernest had expressly wished for morning dress, as we were to take a ride after dinner. His eyes had a triumphant sparkle in expectation of what awaited him on Ali's back. A tall, elegant figure now came up to me, in which I hardly recognised Herr Impach, who looked so distinguished as to leave it doubtful which was the better looking, he or Werdan.

The conversation during dinner turned almost exclusively on the ball, the young artist took no part in it, for he knows none of the persons of whom we spoke.

When I came out into the courtyard in my riding habit, the gentlemen were already assembled, and the horses were being brought round.

Cousin Dorothy approached the carriage, which she was to have all to herself to-day, when my brother looked out for some one to keep her company, and chanced on Impach. He, however, politely declined, while he helped Dorothy into the carriage. When we were all mounted, except the artist and Werdan, the latter walked up to Ali, who showed how fresh he was by neighing and pawing violently. Werdan was stepping carelessly with his riding-whip under his arm and buttoning his glove.

The trick, by means of which he thought to attain his purpose, was to jump on the horse before the latter could foresee his intention. But it was all in vain, for Ali flew to the other side as soon as he felt the slightest touch of the stirrup.

Seeing that all was useless, Werdan with one effort sprang from the ground into the saddle, but before we had time to applaud, Ali commenced a series of bounds which prevented Werdan from finding the stirrups. First he kicked, then reared, and in a moment our Count lay stretched upon the ground.

I thought that Ali was already out of the courtyard, for the grooms ran wildly about, when suddenly I heard him neigh behind me, as a hand was stroking his neck. It was Herr Impach, who, as the horse had tried to rush by him, had caught hold of the reins, and was now quieting him with the soft tones of his voice. My brother rode up to him, and after they had exchanged a few words, I saw Impach get on Ali's back with one leap. The horse reared and plunged, but did not succeed in throwing his rider.

Count Werdan was being brushed by the grooms, grumbling all the while, but in the end he was content to take another horse.

Who on earth could have thought that this son of the Muses was a better horseman than Werdan!

Of course he now rode out with us, and Ernest begged him to go on before with young Prince Arsent, so as to enable him to observe the horse.

I had thought that an artist could only look well with a palette in his hand; now I was obliged to admit, that the powerful, elastic figure of Herr Impach entirely eclipsed the young dandy at his side. The latter is a nobleman of large fortune, whom his family wish to see soon married. If I do not give a false meaning to all he says, I am the happy being on whom his choice has fallen. He is a very timid youth, and does not dare to open his mouth when Werdan is by, whom he considers far too dangerous a competitor.

We hurried quickly out of the town, the two above named on before, my brother and Werdan at my side, the others in the rear. I soon got tired of our too sedate pace, and proposed a gallop through the park. This was what Ali seemed to have been waiting for; he expressed his joy by wild leaps. As my horse was beginning to follow the dangerous example, Ernest bade me ride on with Werdan, and Impach stayed behind, at my brother's side.

I was delighted with the fresh air; and the pleasant exercise; perhaps also at the thought of the coming ball. So pleased, indeed, was I, that I could not endure the sombre face at my side. I tried to cheer Werdan by saying:

"Are you still unhappy about your failure in breaking in Ali?"

"Yes!" he answered, in a cross tone. "A number of such small

failures may bring about the great one which would drive me to despair!"

"Even were you not the horseman you are generally held to be, plenty of excellent qualities remain to save you from a great failure. Look at the fear with which you inspire young Arsent!"

"A great merit indeed! Still all despondency or dissatisfaction vanishes in your presence. When I see you ride so gracefully, your white feathers flying in the air, all my boyish dreams of Armidas and Clorindas return!"

"This is the first direct compliment you have ever paid me, Count. You know that I do not take any notice of such things. Must I believe that your perfect good taste has abandoned you with your good humour?"

"I feel strangely moved,—the forest, the favour of being your sole attendant in this ride, the golden evening sky which gleams through the openings in the trees—perhaps even the reaction of my bad humour of a little while ago. You know that I am anything but sentimental, still at this moment, I should not be ashamed of the words of a poet, to express to you all I feel. Oh! could I do great deeds for you, surmount dangers, bring you safe through the fiercest flames ——"

"Pray reserve all that for some other occasion," I interrupted, stopping my horse at the same time. "Rather see how we can get through this thicket; the young birch-trees force themselves very unreasonably into our path!"

The Count did his best to disperse the branches, without dismounting. He succeeded partly, but one little tree obstinately bent across, and completely obstructed the way. Just as we heard the others come up, Werdan, afraid that some one else would get the start of him, caught hold of the young birch with a strong hand, while with the other he motioned me to ride through.

Either the tree was too much for him or his bad humour rendered him awkward. He let it go suddenly, my horse reared, and leaped forward; in an instant I was at a distance of ten feet. To save Ernest all alarm, I laughed outright as soon as my horse stood still, then touched my head to see if anything had happened to me. My hat was lost; I saw its white feather fluttering in the wind, on the branch of a fir tree far out of reach. The branch had probably been held down by the birch tree, and had been jerked up along with the latter.

I was surrounded by all. Ernest, pale as death, enquired if anything was the matter with me. Count Werdan tried to make his horse go down on his knees before me, but desisted from his extravagant idea, on Ernest's exclaiming:

"He is far too proud to do anything of the kind."

Useless efforts were now made to get my hat back again ; and, to put an end to them, I tied my pocket-handkerchief under my chin. But it was too small. I could not expect any of the gentlemen to climb the slippery fir-tree ; and with a riding whip the little dangling thing was not to be reached. We turned our horses, to get home quickly, but before starting, something urged me to turn my head—certainly not the wish to see my faithless hat once more. There, at the foot of the large fir-tree, stood Ali, with his rider, his eyes lighted with strange fire, his ears put back. What was the matter with the animal ? We very soon found out. The reckless young man, who seems to hold his life very cheaply, was setting spurs to the wild horse, so that the latter, after several fruitless efforts to throw his rider, leaped straight up into the air. At the same moment the rider stood upright in his stirrups, and with a firm hand caught hold of the unhappy hat, just as Ali was making off at a violent gallop. All this happened in half the time it takes me to tell it. We stood breathless until Herr Impach returned, quietly riding the foaming horse. With eyes that craved pardon for the rash act, he gave me back my hat. I bent my head, and lowered my riding-whip, for I could not find words with which to thank him. It was Ernest who spoke.

"Your youth alone can excuse the rash act you have committed." This was said in a fatherly tone. Before he had ended, Ernest rode up to him, took his hand, and said, so softly that only I and the artist could hear him : "I can admire what you have done but never approve of it ! If I have spoken sharply, ascribe it to the anxiety I have suffered for you. It must be painful to my sister to have been the innocent cause of so dangerous and bold an exploit. Make your excuses to her," he concluded, with a smile.

I called Herr Impach to my side, and we rode on in silence. It was not so easy, Amy dear, to find the right word to say to a man who had a moment ago risked his life for a *hat* of mine. Happily he began.

"Your brother is right. I have behaved like a boy, whose fame for courage and daring is not yet firm enough to allow him to miss a single opportunity of displaying those qualities. Will you believe me, that nothing of the kind crossed my mind when I saw your feather fluttering in the wind ? I perceived that the small handkerchief was insufficient for protecting your hair from the evening damp, and of course I tried to recover your hat. I felt sure of succeeding, having from childhood been accustomed to horses, when I always preferred the wildest for my rides through fields and forests."

"You were born in the country ?" I asked.

He answered, hesitatingly, "My father lived there,——"

"Oh, a landlord proprietor ?" I interrupted.

"No proprietor ; only steward of a large estate. He died early ; so

did my mother. My recollections of both parents are but dim. But what am I doing? Forcing the story of my childhood upon your ears' Pardon me."

"Do not forget that I asked you to do so, Herr Impach; I even want to hear more. How came you, who lived in the country, to be an artist?"

"I lived at home until my fourteenth year, for after my father's death his brother had succeeded him. One day a friend, who was staying with us a short while, saw by chance some of my drawings. Declaring them to show talent, he asked permission to take me with him. I was introduced to one of the celebrities of our capital, and there remained until I could do for myself, that is to say, until five years ago. That is my simple story. Without your question, I should never have dared to mention a word of it."

"And was Providence kind in taking you from your rural solitude, and chaining you to art, for at the age you were a positive vocation could hardly exist? Are you happy with your art?"

"What would life be without it? Art is all I possess. For art alone my heart throbs. When I paint, I paint with heart and soul, not with hand and head alone. Could I only tell you what a poor artist feels, when he stands at his easel, his palette in hand, with a worthy model before him!"

It had become quite dark, so that we hurried our horses; still we were not yet out of the park. Is it not strange, Amy, when suddenly new views open to us, new horizons appear of which we had not an idea? What had I thought an artist's life was like? I cannot say, and believe that I thought little or nothing when the word "artist" struck my ear. Now I listened to things which, though new, still sounded interesting to me.

When I had begged the young artist to continue, he spoke as follows:—

"A Columbus, when he enriches humanity with the numberless plains of the new world, cannot be more proud or happy than the true artist who has achieved his masterpiece. The discoverer, who with watchful eye measures the far distance, may be agitated by feelings similar to those of an artist who stands before the blank canvas, on which he alone sees the future—but at the decisive moment the artist is by far the happier of the two. The discoverer, when he lands, only sees a small spot of the world he has long dreamed of, and found at last—he is contented. But the artist with a single glance measures his whole work; it is he who truly enriches the world, for not what was its own before does he give back to it—new un hoped-for things does he create. He may exclaim with truth: 'Had I not lived the world would be the poorer!'

"Were it not so dark," my companion continued after a time, and

in softer tones, "I should perhaps see an astonished look in your eyes; you are too noble for a disdainful one. You are right if you ask. What have you done, that gives you a right to feel, to speak thus? Where are the masterpieces that justify such pride? True! as yet I have done nothing worth speaking of. Still I feel that I too shall accomplish great things, that I shall yet earn a right to say: This work is mine, and that of none other!"

The artist was silent, and I felt that an answer was required. Dear Amy, when I now reflect on his words, they seem full of arrogance and self-conceit! Had you heard the tone of heartfelt persuasion with which he spoke them, you would, like myself, have exclaimed:

"I, too, have the same conviction! Good speed!"

When we reached home we found the house, to my great surprise, in complete darkness. Not a word of reproach fell upon the servants who received us, and yet Ernest is very severe in these matters. In the dark he led me to my room, after dismissing the gentlemen, who hurried home to dress. Fanny had taken to heart Herr Impach's recommendations, and would not leave me until Ernest came to fetch me. First imagine my surprise, when, descending the stairs on Ernest's arm, I found the house changed into a tropical garden, in which the most beautiful camellias, ferns, and palm trees stood side by side. Ernest now took me to my small boudoir, into which I had not set foot for some days. It was changed into the most delightful little fairy bower that ever was dreamed of. On one of the walls, amidst beautiful leafy plants, was an empty space, destined I was told to receive the "Snowflower" when completed. In answer to the grateful look I turned upon Ernest, he told me that although the idea had been his, the execution, for which he had no time, was entirely owing to Werdan, who had been indefatigable in arranging everything to my taste.

"Here he is!" Ernest continued, as a servant entered, announcing the Count.

A few minutes of cosy talk with the two; then the guests began to arrive, and I was obliged to go and receive them in the ball-room.

A little while after the dancing had begun, dear old Baron Gerhardt made his appearance. He is Werdan's uncle on the mother's side, and very fond of his nephew, whose good heart and sound character he never ceases to praise. He is an original, pleasant old gentleman, so that I devoted all my free time during that evening to him. Whenever I gave him my arm to walk through the rooms with him, he would regularly stop like an automaton before the picture in our gallery which has been declared the pearl of the whole collection—an incomparable Rembrandt. With the gallantry belonging to times past, he would say:

"Although it seems a sin to admire anything beside you, as all must

pale when compared with you, still I cannot refrain from declaring this picture to be the object of all my most fervent desires. Were it in my possession, my Rembrandt collection would be complete. Every progress, every change in the great master's manner do I possess and the conclusion, the crown of all, I must miss. It is a dreadful injustice !”

You can imagine, Amy, that to listen to the lamentable story of this monomaniac more than once was anything but amusing. I am not so weary of the world as to despise a ballroom with its glow of lights, with the soft scent of flowers, the merry tones of the orchestra, the whirling couples, who danced with such fire, as though they had at last found the aim of their life, after having long sought for it in vain. It all had a magic effect upon me. As lady of the house, with whom they all wished to dance, I was obliged to adopt the Russian manner, and only dance once round with each. To give you details of the ball would be impossible, for very few of the younger people were in their right senses. Now a hasty word with someone who went past ; a moment after a congratulation and a smile of gratitude ; now a dance ; and now a short conversation entered into with the speed of a firework. The supper at last put an end to all this. As we sat round the long table in the narrow hall, I could see what a choice collection of pretty faces were assembled that evening. And all were so gay ; there seemed no end to the talking and laughing.

When the cotillon was announced, I suddenly remembered that I had not yet chosen a partner. I looked about me for a moment. There, in my boudoir, stood Herr Impach amidst my flowers, his eye intently bent on me as I passed. Why not he, as well as any other ? It was a mad thought, was it not, Amy ? I felt that in a moment, and went up to Ernest to ask him if he approved of my choosing Werdan for the cotillon.

As I came up, my brother took the young man at his side by the hand, and said to me :

“ Prince Arsent has just begged for the honour of your hand for this dance. I have promised to be his advocate in this important cause.”

How very kind, brother, I thought. Still, being disengaged, I took Arsent's arm, and walked up to our places with him. I should have preferred Werdan for a partner ; because his uncle had taught me to view his character in quite a new light. All the gentlemen in the room seemed to think that, being lady of the house, I had no right to rest for a moment, and perpetually called me up. Never in all my life have I done so much in the way of dancing, no, not even in the country. At last I could stand it no longer, and stretched my hand out in defence, every time I saw someone come up to me. By this means I was at last enabled to listen to the idyll Arsent was pouring into my ear. He described his castle, its picturesque neighbourhood,

and even his father, who seems to be a very nice old gentleman. After some time, during which no one had come near, I again saw a hand, which invited me to dance, with a bouquet of snowdrops. I did not look up, but refused, as before, by a movement of the hand, when all at once the snowdrops fell to the ground. This was a sign of despair which urged me to lift up my eyes. Before me stood Herr Impach with drooping head, just about to return to his dark corner.

"I was tired, and have refused more than ten times!" I said in excuse. Still, I got up, and laid my hand on his shoulder. Do you remember, Amy, how we admired the Queen's Grand Chamberlain, Eppstein, when he showed us how he danced with her Majesty? Well, Herr Impach danced the same way with me, that is to say, without placing his arm round my waist; the only hold of me he had was my hand on his shoulder. And yet I do not recollect ever having flown through a room so lightly! When we returned to my seat, the strange man took his snowdrops up again, and went quietly away.

When the ball was over, and everyone gone, my brother asked me to go with him into my new little room, as he wished to speak with me.

"You are twenty years old to-day," he began, "and although I could wish for nothing better than that things should for ever go on as they do now, still I must not take any notice of my heart's desire, must not be selfish, but think of your future welfare with the disinterestedness of a parent. That a great number of persons would be only too happy to connect themselves with your beauty, your youth and your name, you know full well. To select the worthiest amongst these, and propose them to you for acceptance or rejection, is my duty. It is with such a proposal that I now come to you—can you not guess, Eleanor?"

"Count Werdan has been more attentive to me this evening than he ever was. Can it be he?"

"Werdan, my child, will certainly come some day or other, and that is one of the reasons why I should like you to decide upon something soon. I think highly of him; number him among my best friends; but in the choice of a brother-in-law I must take into consideration a great many things. You know that Werdan possesses nothing besides the modest fortune of his mother, his father having squandered all before he died. For half his wants he is dependent on his old uncle. Now although, in all probability, Werdan and his cousin will be the old Baron's heirs, still we cannot count upon that with any degree of security. You see that Werdan is out of the question, my child. My aspirant is Prince Arsent!"

"Dear Ernest," I answered, putting my arm round my brother's neck, "let me still for a time be happy with you! I know that you only advise me for my own good, but in that case do not speak to me of Arsent."

"Do not decide in such a hurry, Eleanor!" spoke Ernest softly. "You do not know Arsent yet; take time to do so, then give me your answer. You know that neither your mother nor your ancestors waited like shepherdesses until their heart spoke, but married in the interest of their families, and were happy all the same. Wherever you go, my sweet Eleanor, you will see happy faces shine around you, for your smile alone brings joy. Good-night to you now, dear sister; sleep sweetly, and do not let your dreams be disturbed by any importunate suitors. You have all the time you like before you!"

I went to my room in deep thought. If I had you here, we should soon find out together what was the matter. But how describe the state my mind is in? The total absence of any liking for Arsent is in opposition to the sincere wish to act according to my brother's advice. It is impossible that Werdan should be the reason of this inner conflict. I do not think that I ever thought of him as anything more than a pleasant companion. This evening, certainly, when all was arranged so beautifully to surprise me, I was for a moment moved, but it was most likely nothing more than the pardon for his awkwardness during our ride.

You find out, Amy dear, what is the matter with your Eleanor. I shall go to bed and try to forget the hundred new impressions of these last days.

Ernest has told me how old Baron Gerhardt offered him an enormous sum for his "Old Woman" by Rembrandt. Is it not foolish of him to think that my brother cares so little for his pictures as to sell any of them?

Good-bye, dear friend, I must at last close this endless letter.

YOUR ELEANOR.

V.

Not more than a week ago, Geoffrey, I was sure of enjoying to-day with you the last "Ottobrata";* sure that I should have turned my back on Germany for a long time. And here I am, spell-bound, at once the happiest and the most miserable of mortals!

When I promised to paint a second "Snowdrop" I went home with the firm intention of doing nothing of the kind. I meant to pack up and hurry into your arms, my friend. To this heroic resolve I held fast for a long while; but in the meantime I continually put off my journey, for reasons so sound that I could not tell you one of them at the present moment. Nearer and nearer drew the day, when something must be decided upon. I sat down in good earnest, trying for once to become clear in my mind. What was I in such a mortal

* In Rome so-called excursions made every Thursday in October, when high and low, rich and poor, dine out in the country.

fright about? I asked myself. Frankly and openly the answer presented itself to me: Like an idiot, you are in love with a being whom rank, beauty and riches for ever separate you from, between whom and you stands a barrier across which you should never have looked, as surmounting it is one of the few impossibilities on earth. Hurry away, before ruin becomes inevitable!

To this truthful confession, Geoffrey, my mind began opposing a whole army of reasons with such Machiavellian subtlety that I myself was surprised. First the question: Why should what you feel conscious of be love? Have you not longed for beauty alone all your life? Is it not natural that when a being like this appears to the eye, that had long sighed for perfection, your soul should rejoice in having at last found the long-sought ideal? What you feel is admiration, naught beyond admiration! Stay, and your tranquillity of mind will return.

All that seemed so probable to me, that I remained. Some excuse I must give for not keeping my word, I thought, and on the day determined upon, I took my way to the Waldenberg Palace.

A vile sycophant you would have declared me to be had you seen me. I was charmed that the sittings were to begin the very next day, happy at the Prince's kind words, inebriated by the amiable ways of the Princess. When I got home, I confessed to myself that the princess regards my talent somewhat in the light of the cleverness of a terrier who fetches a stick out of the water. In her presence no such thought struck me. I tried to persuade myself that her engaging manner was not owing to depreciation. I went home in a state of ecstasy, Geoffrey; 'tis with deep shame that I confess it; when the thought of flight once more occurred to me, I called myself a coward—a coward, do you hear?

Armed with the determination of a hero, I entered the room which had been assigned to me for a studio; and my trembling hands had somewhat recovered their firmness by the time I had ended my preparations. Just as I was about to examine the canvas, the door opened, and *she* entered. How shall I describe her to you? I would give anything to be able to draw a worthy image of her on this paper. I stood there like a stupid lout, who is conscious of having visited his neighbour's orchard, instead of attending at school. But her amiable ways soon relieved me of the embarrassment her first appearance had caused. She sat down; with one single movement of her hand, laid her dress into light and graceful folds which I should have spent hours in producing; then asked if all was as I desired. She did this in so self-conscious a tone, that direct opposition woke up within me, and the thought struck me: These fine ladies are all alike; a set of wax dolls. Strong in their power over men, their pride and arrogance know no bounds.

I then told her that her hair, built up high on the head, according to the present fashion, did not suit an artistic purpose.

I had calculated upon her leaving the room, to hide from me the artful contrivances with which she had adorned her head. No such thing! She gracefully leaned back in her easy-chair, picked a battery of pins out of the plaits and curls, so that these fell like fluid gold upon her snowy shoulders; and when this operation, during which I dared not look on, was completed, what do you think she did, Geoffrey? In the coolest manner possible she told me to arrange her hair to my own taste!

I felt that this must be addressed to the "terrier," for I knew well that she would never let an equal come in contact with her golden hair! Even knowing this, I was moved as by electric fire, at the mere thought of touching the beloved locks. I walked up to her and laid both my hands on her hallowed head. Had I but never dared so much, Geoffrey! Dearly I paid for the sacrilege. Scarcely had I felt the soft, silky mass around my fingers, when I began trembling violently, the hair seemed to wind round my hands like serpents; I quivered as a child. And yet I felt as if I *must* press that beloved head to my swelling heart, with all the force of the most ardent love that ever entered a man's breast, and as if I must shed tears on that golden hair, tears that would lighten my heart's anguish. As a child draws them from the fire, I drew my hands out of the tempting region. Walking back to my place, I won composure enough to declare myself unable to accomplish the task.

You, who are not present, cannot comprehend all this. You must think me childish, foolish; yet I never was more myself than at the present moment, Geoffrey. A sure evidence of this is the picture I am now painting, which is so admired by all who see it. It certainly is the best I ever made. Besides, you must not think that this love always closes my lips. I can speak with her for hours, about our art, about my life, even about my plans for the future. And she listens so patiently; even helps me in planning; so that we never want for subjects of conversation. Sometimes, as I watch her speaking to other young men (a swarm of them surround her, and drive me to despair), it seems almost as if her gaiety did not come so entirely from the heart, as is the case when we are alone. Her interest seems to be less lively in listening to the talk of those who pay court to her, than when I explain some secret of art.

By what merits she is judged by persons of this class you will understand when I tell you what happened to me.

The Prince, who fully appreciates the little talent I may have, is just twice as kind and cordial with me since I broke in a wild horse of his, which had thrown its rider. What my art did *not* gain for me—a warm pressure of the hand—I was to owe to my strong sinews, to a daring leap!

And since that day I am admitted to their circle. If I do not attend to general invitations, then I am seized upon in the studio, and forced to take part in their pleasures. Daily I must support new delights and new tortures.

It was thus I came to a ball last week, given in the house of the Prince. Had you but seen her!

I have danced with her, Geoffrey, she had refused every one because she was tired, and with me she danced, although I scarcely know where I found impudence enough to ask her.

Do you think that I could have touched her person? Not to save my life, and so I danced with her without any hold.

What I felt, during the moments we flew through the room, her hand on my shoulder, her breath so near me, has brought me to the resolution that I *must* hurry away. As soon as my picture is finished, I leave this town never to return. 'Tis all useless; I may close my eyes as much as I like, some light still dawns through them. The day will come when she will follow the man of her brother's or her own choice to the altar. And what then? *Where* should I find strength to support such dreadful misery? *where* the courage not to end this poor life? which is no life when the sunshine of her eyes does not enlighten it.

I filled the measure of my sufferings by watching her at the ball, as she moved through the maze of her numberless admirers. Not one who would not give up friends and country for one pressure of her hand. Wherever she goes, loving looks follow her graceful figure, whilst she moves about as if it were natural to her to receive homage wherever she turns. It was with throbs of happiness I remarked, that no one of her many admirers was especially favoured, yet more than one of them would sacrifice life and fortune for her. Amongst others a certain Count Werdan; a man whose wit and presence of mind I should under other circumstances greatly admire, but whom I find insupportable, because he is a sort of *intime* in the house. Not rich himself, he is the favourite of an old uncle, who as much as the nephew seems to wish for a connection with Princess Eleanor. I made the old gentleman's acquaintance at the ball, where he showed himself an enthusiastic admirer of art. He took my arm, and leading me to the finest picture in the Waldenberg collection, an exquisite Rembrandt, began praising it as a lover does his ideal. His most ardent wish is to possess the picture; a fact he told me the first evening of our acquaintance; and in the presence of his nephew he exclaimed, addressing himself to the latter, What a purpose to rob one of one's sleep!—if we could obtain both the treasures of this house!"

I listened anxiously, for it is a habit I have acquired to apply all I hear to Eleanor. This time I was right.

"Why should we not succeed?" the old gentleman continued. "The old one for me, the young one for you!"

The Count made a sign to his uncle not to continue, as he seemed to think it unnecessary that I should know of their plans. But I had heard enough. The uncle wishes for Rembrandt's picture (it represents a shrivelled old woman) for himself, for his nephew the daughter of the house. I could have strangled the old gentleman with the greatest pleasure on earth. Instead of that I had to suffer him to take my arm, and confidently whisper in my ear how he had offered an enormous price for the picture, but had not obtained it all the same; how often his nephews had tried for it, thinking to please their uncle by their efforts. Now he had promised to name that one of the two his heir who should succeed in getting the picture. "Do you think I shall ever be so happy as to call it mine?" he concluded.

"I heartily wish you may!" I answered. "The prize you have promised is great enough to sharpen their wits."

To find out diplomatically what Eleanor thought of Werdan, I began talking of the old gentleman's hobby.

"I know all about it," she said. "Of course, there can be no question of my brother's giving up the picture. If the old Baron would content himself with a copy, *that* we should only be too delighted to let him have."

She then broke off, and began speaking of other subjects, so that I knew as much or as little of Werdan as ever. But it is exactly in this silence of hers that I see approaching danger; and I have resolved to go away whenever Werdan comes to the house, as I could not support the spectacle of a happy courtship.

I must close my letter now, not having dressed yet for the evening, which I must do, as there is a *soirée* at the palace.

Geoffrey, for more than a month past I cannot entertain a thought without despising myself for it half an hour afterwards—a pleasant state of things.

No, I cannot support it any longer. As soon as my picture is finished I take flight. Expect me, dearest friend, at latest in four weeks. Get me a room not too distant from your lodging. Good-bye.

Yours, WALTER.

(*To be continued.*)

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

ENGLAND was passing through that fiery trial, from the ashes of which sprang all that is most precious in a nation's life—the spirit of pure religion, of political freedom, of daring enterprise, the spirit of the highest poetry. Mary was on the throne, writing the history of her reign in blood. It was then that Philip Sidney was born.

The gloom and terror that pervaded the time doubtless tinged in some degree his earliest impressions. He may have caught fragments of tales about burning men, and women dragged from the arms of husbands or children, told by his nurses while he was supposed to be sleeping in his little bed. As he played at his mother's feet, a vague notion of something that was to be feared may have filtered into his young intelligence, as in tones of anguish that would naturally arouse her boy's loving attention, she implored her husband, whose Protestant opinions were publicly known, not needlessly to expose himself to the royal displeasure. But all such shadows must have been quickly swept away from his mind by the wonder-world of sunshine, and waving trees, and antlered deer, and bright field flowers, which the park of Penshurst (his father's country house) must have been for a child.

Whether scampering down the long passages, half believing that from some dark corner one of those terrible black-robed figures belonging to the Spanish inquisition, that he had heard so often described, might spring out upon him, or whether chasing butterflies over the grass, we may be sure that one little figure, somewhat smaller than himself, was always at his side. This was his sister Mary, the closest friend and confidante of his whole life, from the day when he began to prattle, till the day when the funeral pageant for the young hero swept in sad state through the streets of London.

On the accession of Elizabeth, the Sidney family came out of the comparative retirement in which they had lately been living into the most brilliant light of court favour. The Queen, with all a woman's quick discernment, soon found out what true metal there was in the Sidney character, and by her Sir Henry, little Philip's father, was made at once Lord Deputy of Ireland and Lord President of Wales. In this latter capacity Sir Henry Sidney and his family spent much of their time at Ludlow Castle.

Philip Sidney was now naturally and healthily worked upon by all the ruling influences of his day. An intense religious earnestness, such as has seldom stirred in the heart of any nation, was living and breathing at this period throughout the mass of the English people,

whispering at their firesides, crying aloud in their streets, colouring their literature, turning their very girls into deep divines. Young Sidney caught the noble infection, and a strong religious feeling became one of the foundation stones of his character.

A reverence, nay, almost a worship of their Queen, was one of the articles in the creed of the Protestant gentlemen of the time. They did not see her as we see her now through the microscope of criticism held up by the hand of some captious historian. To them she was the sovereign who had come to build up Bible Truth, and establish national prosperity. To them she was the Amazon who stood forward braver than any Brittomart or Bradamante as the champion of the reformed faith. To them she was the gracious patroness of every gentle art, of learning, and science, and commerce. To them she was the woman who, with a face that must have possessed an intellectual charm that no painter has handed down to us, smiled on them, and flirted with them, and loved each delicate flattery, each chivalrous service that is prized by the softest of her sex. Philip Sidney then, like every young man of his age and standing, learned to think of Elizabeth as one who was to be looked up to, as one who was to be obeyed, as one who was to be even died for with joy.

After the Reformation the minds of men and women in England woke as with an electric shock. In every one there was a great yearning to give a distinct form to this new something that had risen up within them. They dashed off sonnets, wrote plays and romances, composed treatises. In this respect Philip Sidney's times were very like our own. There has never been in England such an age of universal intellectual activity as the age of Elizabeth, until the age of Victoria. Philip's quickly developing talents made him foremost in this marked peculiarity of his epoch, and he literally lisped in numbers.

Sidney was sent to Shrewsbury School, where he was remarkable for his thoughtful, studious habits, and where he soon became a first-rate classical scholar. While thus advanced in mental culture, he was not behind in those manly exercises which were considered so indispensable for a gentleman of that day. He was early familiar with his saddle, and among his schoolfellows there was no more skilful fencer than he.

In due time Sidney went from Shrewsbury School to Oxford. During his college life he was no troller of merry catches at noisy supper-parties, no carpet knight who wrought havoc among the hearts of maids and matrons in the old university town. His nature was always more inclined to the grave than to the gay, and his high principle set up a barrier between him and the excesses of youth. At Oxford, however, he strengthened the bulwarks of his Greek and Latin, dreamt dreams for his future which were half literary and half martial, and made

one life-long friend. This was Fulke Greville, afterwards one of the most finished gentlemen and elegant scholars at the court of Elizabeth.

Philip Sidney's education was completed at eighteen. Boys went from school to college and left the university much earlier than they do now. The Queen at once took him into her own special service, as she did all the young men of promise who were brought by their fathers to her court. She was a good and judicious mistress to them in the main ; a little jealous and exacting perhaps at times, and now and then showing something of womanly caprice in her dealings with them, but on the whole kind and generous, and far-sighted for their welfare.

Philip Sidney's first entrance into public life was as member of an embassy that was sent to France to negotiate a marriage between Elizabeth and the Duc d'Alençon, the brother of the French King. Very strange and new must his experiences have been at the French court. Let us try for a moment to get a photographic view of what he saw there.

The central figure is that of a woman. As we look at her we are at first inclined to think her the very embodiment of tranquil elderly matronhood. The full form moves with a lazy ease, the hands are soft and round and white, a placid light shines in the face. But let us draw nearer and watch her more closely. What concentrated passion there is in those low tones, as she whispers to a black-robed priest who is bending towards her. What terrible energy stirs in every muscle of her frame, as she walks up and down her private room. What fierce gleams flash now and then from those quiet eyes, as she sits apart in deep thought. We turn away with a shudder, and well we may, for Catherine de Médicis is meditating the tragedy of Saint Bartholomew. We are not long in finding another prominent form. This time it is a man who attracts our attention. He tries to walk with dignity through the gilded hall, but his limbs move with an awkwardness that would seem to be better suited to a guard-room than a palace. He begins to make a gracious speech to an old veteran, but it ends in a meaningless joke. He stoops to clasp a bracelet that is falling from a white arm, but he does it so roughly that he crushes the shining band. They bow before him, they surround him with a delicate ceremonial worship of etiquette ; but all in vain, they cannot turn the clod into a divinity, and it is hard to believe that this is Charles the Ninth, King of France.

And now there is a sound as of music. Yet neither lute nor viol is touched ; it is only the voice and the laughter of a woman. What subtle grace lurks in each fold of her dress, what love-meshes are woven by each floating lock of that radiant hair ; how does soft desire sleep in her eyes, and wake up in her smile, and hang upon her cheek.

No wonder that the schoolman neglects to notice whether the quantities are true or false when she speaks Latin. No wonder that the soldier forgets whether he belongs to the Pope or Calvin when the sunshine of her glances falls upon him. No wonder that they will suffer for her, no wonder that they will live for her, no wonder that they will die for her; for her, the brilliant, the frail, the fair; for her, Marguerite de Valois.

But how is it that the cavalier who is bending over this bright lady seems to find his task of courting her such a distasteful one? His compliments must be made of lead, to judge from the slowness with which they drop from his lips. His foot taps impatiently the marble floor, as if it wanted to be in the stirrup, or to be treading the grass far away in the forest. His eyes often wander restlessly from the lovely face before him. And she does not seem to like the game any better than he, for the fan often goes up to hide a yawn. We know him, this discontented suitor, we know him from that frank grace, so careless and yet so kingly. We know him from the fire of martial genius in his eyes. We know him, the joyous in love, the mighty in war, the prudent in council. Already we hear his battle cry: "Rally round my white plume. Brothers and comrades, rally round your Prince, your hero, your Henri of Navarre!" These two—Henri and Marguerite—are in a few days to be wedded. But there is no love between them. The bridegroom was enticed here by the arts of the Queen-mother, and is kept in a sort of honourable captivity. Besides, hatred of the Valois, born in his blood, is an effectual barrier between him and Marguerite. The bride has half a dozen other lovers that she prefers to her promised husband. But the eyes of Catherine are upon them, and the pair go on with their icy wooing.

But who is this, with his long hair distilling rich perfumes, with his gold-spangled doublet, and his neck hung round with jewels? Surely he must be some player who is come to amuse the grand folk at the royal wedding. No, he is a prince, and the crown will soon rest upon his head. He is the king's brother, Henri, Duc d'Anjou.

After this glimpse of the French court, we can well imagine what a change it must have been for young Sidney from the court of his own maiden Queen.

Philip Sidney was in Paris throughout the whole of the terrible day and night of St. Bartholomew. He saw the first act in the great tragedy. He saw the platform erected in the front of *Nôtre Dame* for the marriage ceremony, and the altar blazing with gold and tapers, the gorgeously-robed priests, the unwilling bride in her shining dress, and the sullen bridegroom. He saw the feasting, and the revelry, and the crowds of going and coming guests on the grand staircase. He saw the bride led forth to dance, trembling even while she trod her bridal measure, for she had gained some half knowledge of what was

about to happen; and this daughter of the Valois, in whom all womanly feeling was not extinct, had clung to her mother and prayed for mercy.

At night, Sidney must have been awakened by cries and the clash of arms in the streets. Perhaps he may have thought it some new marriage pageant; but on going to the window he must quickly have found out the hideous truth. When the first terrible surprise was over, no doubt he and the other English gentlemen—his companions—were half inclined to rush down to the help of their Protestant brethren. But it would have been a worse than useless waste of life to have left the safe shelter of the English Embassy, merely to be overpowered by numbers and cut down in the darkness. They were therefore forced to content themselves with cursing priestly power, and thanking God that England was—what she was.

Sidney's stay in Paris seems for a time somewhat to have sickened him of the course of public life he had begun. He separated himself from his companions, and went for a long continental tour. At Frankfort he became acquainted with Languet, a well-known learned man of that day, who used his talents chiefly in writing on the liberal side of the great religious question that then agitated all Europe. The grave cast of both their minds quickly drew Sidney and Languet towards each other, and before long a firm bond was woven between them. There are few prettier things in the annals of friendship than the anxious care shown by the elderly scholar for the young Englishman in certain Latin letters that he afterwards wrote to him.

Another friend made by Sidney while he was abroad was William the Silent, Prince of Orange. We can fancy the loving reverence with which young Philip must have looked into the face of the great chief of Protestantism, the man with the large heart, who pleaded for the very assassins that sought his life; the man who, standing alone in his grey worsted jerkin in the midst of his people, was more entire ruler over his free subjects than was the King of France in velvet and ermine, hedged round by his body-guard. The high opinion conceived by the Prince of Orange of Philip Sidney is evinced by his sending a special message a little while after to Elizabeth, advising her to employ him in some mission of importance.

After having travelled through Germany and part of Italy, Sidney at length returned home. He was well received by the Queen, who, however, kept him for some little time dawdling about at her court, as it was her wont to do with most of the men in turns that served her. He fretted a little at this forced inaction; but still this court of Elizabeth was a place where a young man might well linger without weariness for awhile. There were Raleigh and Bessie Throgmorton whispering in passages and by- corners; anywhere, in fact, where the Queen could not see them; and when his Bessie was gone (called away

by the often somewhat imperious voice of her mistress), there was Raleigh himself, full of his grand dreams about that wonderful new land of America, where each flower was a marvel, and the rivers were seas, and the virgin silver glimmered in the mine. There was Mary Bridges, her eyes and her wit all alight. There was Elizabeth Vernon, glowing like a rose-garden, if Southampton turned his looks towards her. There was Burghley with whom to discuss kingcraft, and Bacon with whom to talk philosophy.

By-and-by Elizabeth sent Philip Sidney again abroad on some negotiation connected with the German Protestants. In this business his friend Languet was a great help to him. He performed his mission well, and came home with honour. Soon after his return, however, he fell into temporary disgrace with the Queen, for counselling her to give up the French marriage, which was still on the cards, Sidney had many reasons for doing this. He had seen enough of the Valois at home to be certain that such a union, in a domestic point of view, would be an unhappy one for Elizabeth. His pride as an Englishman revolted at the thought of seeing a French prince in the palace of his Queen. Besides, he doubted the political expedience of such an alliance. We believe that in her inmost heart Elizabeth fully agreed with Sidney on all these points, and that in reality she never seriously thought of the French match. But throughout her life it amused her and tickled her vanity to have various protracted matrimonial schemes in hand; and, moreover, she did not choose that this boy, Philip Sidney, handsome and clever though he were, should presume to advise her; indeed, she often would not bear such conduct from her oldest counsellors. She therefore gave him a few sharp words, and dismissed him from her presence for awhile.

Sidney retired to Wilton, the home of his sister Mary, now Countess of Pembroke. There he spent what were, perhaps, the happiest six months of his life. Lady Pembroke was a woman of high cultivation and most refined tastes. Philip quickly slipped with her into literary pursuits, and forgot the kings and kingdoms of the earth.

With Mary's delicate ear ready to give judgment on every sentence, with her sympathetic eyes ready to read every page, he wrote his "*Arcadia*." It is a prose romance, full of the highest moral teaching, and adorned with much bright imagination and airy fancy. It would be looked upon as very dull reading in our day, but it was exactly the sort of writing that was fashionable in Sidney's time.

Sidney never finished the "*Arcadia*." His own estimation of it was so humble that before his death he said he hoped it would be destroyed.

But his sister, in whose possession it was, could not bear to part with so dear a relic. Sidney had written it for her, and given it to her,

and as his gift she kept it. It was thus preserved, and has come down to us as a monument of a noble nature and a high intellect.

But to return to Philip Sidney himself. The Queen soon recalled him to court. He was Leicester's nephew, and she could never long be angry with anyone connected with sweet Robin. Sidney soon fully re-established himself in the royal favour by writing a mask called "The Lady of the May" in the Queen's honour. A little while after Elizabeth knighted him, and he became Sir Philip.

The story of Sidney's heart is thought by some to be very perplexing. It can, however, we think, be read in a perfectly simple and natural way.

His first boyish love was, we believe, given to Lady Penelope Devereux, the daughter of Lord Essex. She was beautiful and highly gifted. The parents of both sides liked the match. But as he grew older, Sidney held back. Time went on. Penelope's father died, and when he was dying said that he wished his daughter to be given to Philip Sidney. Still Philip did not speak the decisive words that would have gained for him his bride. The true cause of this unaccountable hesitation was, we believe, that he had begun to see flaws in Penelope's character. Another motive, doubtless, was that he had met Fanny Walsingham. Penelope was more beautiful than Fanny, but in Fanny was the truer metal; that was the greater charm in Sidney's eyes. Penelope's relations grew tired at length of waiting, and married her to Lord Rich, an old man she did not love. Sidney was, doubtless, not sorry that the question was thus settled for him, and Fanny Walsingham soon became Lady Sidney.

Penelope's future story proved that Sidney had judged her but too well; but when we blame Lady Rich, the faithless wife, the lover of unscrupulous Mountjoy, we must remember that against her will she was given to a man who had not a fragment of her heart.

Though his passion for Penelope was dead, a perfume of sentiment seems always to have hung for Sidney round his old love. It was the fashion of the time for poets to pay certain ladies the compliment of addressing to them their rhymes and sonnets. The woman thus honoured was never the woman that they really loved. This fact was well known in society in those days. With something of the past still lingering in his heart, Philip Sidney paid Lady Rich this sort of courteous homage, and celebrated her in his verse as Stella. It must be remembered that when Sidney did this, Lady Rich had not sunk as low as she afterwards did. His conduct in this respect could never have cost Lady Sidney a single prick of jealousy, for she was, of course, used to the customs of her time on this point.

Philip Sidney began after awhile to grow weary of inaction. He had, it is true, new and dear home ties, but his nature was essentially energetic. He was not the man to lie all his life at his wife's feet. Sir

Francis Drake was just about to start for an expedition to the West Indies. Sidney resolved to accompany him, and went to Plymouth to join the fleet. Lady Sidney no doubt understood her husband's character, and, like the brave, good woman that she was, made no sign whatever of what was in her heart. Before, however, Sidney could embark, he was stopped by the Queen's command. What induced this sudden capricious order it is impossible to say. Perhaps Leicester, who had a strong affection for his nephew, and who may have feared for him the dangers of the long voyage, influenced Elizabeth in this matter. We may well believe that Sir Philip returned home in no very amiable frame of mind, and that, even-tempered man though he was in general, Lady Sidney had for some months not exactly a pleasant time of it. A little daughter, however, came by-and-by to cheer the pair. The Queen stood godmother to her, and showered other honours on Sidney, who knew well enough that she was in reality a true friend, with all her whims; and by degrees the shadow of discontent passed away from his spirit. Lord Leicester was about to start for Holland as commander-in-chief of the English army, which was going thither to support the Protestant cause. This time Sidney was not kept at home. He went with his uncle, and was made Governor of Flushing, where his wife joined him.

Sidney, always earnest in everything that he had in hand, wanted at once to begin military operations. Leicester, however, loitered receiving here a complimentary address, presiding there at a state banquet, and otherwise sunning himself in the light of his own greatness. At length hostilities began, and Sir Philip Sidney, with a body of English troops under his command, besieged Zutphen. One day the English, led by their young general in person, made a gallant charge beneath the fire of the enemy's guns. A ball struck Sidney, breaking his thigh, and he fell from his horse. Even then his beautiful, unselfish nature asserted itself over physical pain; for as they bore him to the rear, he sent a cup of water, that was being held to his own parched lips, to a dying common soldier. For some days he lingered, his mind so clear and active that he dictated as he lay there a touching little poem, his heart by turns rising in humble faith to God, and going out in love to those who watched around him. When the end was very near, and he could not speak, they asked him to give some sign that he was of good courage. Sidney clasped his hands upon his breast. So went to his God one of England's noblest Christian gentlemen.

ALICE KING.

THROUGH WIND AND RAIN.

By MARY CECIL HAY, Author of "Old Myddelton's Money."

YES, that's the portrait of the present Squire. Handsome? No; I don't think we old servants ever call him handsome. I dare say you are right, though, and if we'd known him *less*, we might have spoken of his being handsome. *We* only know him as the kindest master and the tenderest son in all the world. Yet I daresay you are right, for when I'm here by myself among the portraits (the servants wondering why their old housekeeper wanders over the house so much alone) it is always to *his* face I turn with the best memories, and there is nothing then to dim my spectacles, as there is when my eyes rest upon the portraits opposite—you see them? the portraits of his father and grandfather.

It was just such a night as this that ushered in the new year five-and-twenty years ago; and even now, that evening is as clear in my memory as this has been, though Wesmede to-day is filled with guests and gaiety, and the old house echoes music and laughter, instead of that one strange cry.—*Promised* to tell you, did I? Come nearer to the fire then, and throw on another log. Many a night I've sat just here, to see the old year die. Sometimes in that wonderful silence of the starshine; sometimes in brilliant moonlight, when that line of heath road beyond the park lay like a broad white ribbon on the brown; and sometimes, as it does to-night—and did upon that other night just five-and-twenty years ago—panting for its breath and dying in passionate tears. You can see now how the poplars, far away against the sky there, bend like reeds; and when the hurrying clouds fly by and leave the young moon uncovered, you can trace that bridle path across the heath, glistening like a shallow brook. Just such a night as this it was, wild, wet, and gusty, when the old Squire and I stood watching——

But how's this? I ought not to be in the middle of my story before I begin. Let me see—there's another New Year's Eve that I can remember, fifty years ago, when the Squire held his new-born infant in his arms, with such a smile as we had never seen upon his face before, and stood there in a dream, until they roused him to tell him that his young wife could not live.

All in all, was the boy to his father from that very night, yet at first there was sometimes a fancy among us that our master's great affection for his son came second to his pride in his heir. He was growing old, you see, and of course there must have been times when he had feared

that the proud old name would die, and the place he loved so well go to that distant branch of the Capletons, of which Captain Warder was the living representative—a cold, middle-aged man, whom the old Squire never had liked. But now that the son and heir was born, Mr. Capleton (with some new feeling) turned round and seemed to grow fond of this heir presumptive—as they called him. But *we* didn't, and there was a conviction among us that whenever he came to Wesmede it was because he either wanted money in a hurry, or had nowhere else to go.

For years after the little heir was born, Captain Warder didn't come to Wesmede at all. He might have been too angry, or he might have been really abroad, as it was reported. But gradually his visits were resumed, and then, year by year, they grew longer and more frequent.

At Wesmede everything went smoothly and happily for the Squire through his son's boyhood; for though of course Mr. Will got into trouble sometimes, as schoolboys will, the troubles never lasted; for the boy was gentle and true-hearted, even if he *had* a share of his father's self-will. So the time went on, until within a few days of Mr. Will's leaving college—when he was to come home for a few weeks, then join a party of friends, and travel for a year, before settling at Wesmede and taking the Squire's duties upon himself. Just as we were dreading lest Mr. Capleton should fret through his son's long absence, a distant connection of his died, leaving an only daughter unprovided for. So the Squire, when he heard this, went off at once to Scotland, and brought back the orphan girl with him.

Her portrait here? Of course it is, for she was one of the Capletons, you know, though she was so poor that I've seen her turn the bows of ribbon on her dress, and patch the pages of her music. Beautiful? I don't know, because I've heard so many different faces called beautiful. At first the servants called her "puny;" then I noticed that the maids grew to imitate her, and dropped their voices when they spoke of her. As for me, from the very first moment that my eyes rested on her, I saw what won my heart. Her face was narrow and delicate, yet there was a sweet and steadfast light upon it which made it beautiful beyond what I had ever before understood of the word.

How well I remember the day Mr. Will came home from college and found her standing shyly at his father's side waiting for him. Such a glance came into his eyes that, though I'd known them all his life, I felt I'd never seen them properly till then. Of course I could only guess how he spent that evening, the first through which he had ever had a girl companion at home; but before a week had passed, I had seen what made me sad enough.

"If Agnes does her duty, Will," I heard the Squire say one morning, while Mr. Will stood against the low oak chimney-piece in the hall,

with his face bent, "I shall give her a wedding portion, and marry her to Warder. I shall be doing both of them a good turn. And that reminds me, Will, Luxleigh tells me his daughter returns from Paris next year, to take her place at the head of his house."

No answer from Mr. Will, but the Squire didn't notice it, and went on in a pleasant, satisfied tone.

"I've never kept you in the dark as to my intentions, Will, have I? You've always been fully aware of the good fortune in store for you. Luxleigh's estate and Luxleigh's daughter go together, and the prize is to be yours on your return; always supposing, Will, that you act your own part like a gentleman and—a lover."

"And if I don't?"

The Squire's laugh rang out with a merriment which had not a grain of suspicion in it. "If you lose your reason during the next year—put it that way, Will." When Mr. Will looked up, I was passing him, in leaving the hall, and I remember wondering how it was the Squire could be so unsuspecting. When I reached my own room, still thinking over that expression on my young master's face, I found Miss Agnes standing at the window, looking out into the park as she waited for me. When we had held our usual morning discussion, she turned to the window again before leaving the room.

"If you are looking for Mr. Will, Miss Agnes," said I, standing with my back to her, and speaking easily what, with my old-fashioned notions, I fancied it would be wise to say, "he's in the hall. The master has been talking to him of his wedding with Miss Luxleigh. I was re-arranging the curtains, and the master told me not to go, so I heard them."

She was facing me now, innocently and wistfully meeting my eyes, so my next words almost choked me.

"For years this has been an understood thing, Miss Agnes—did you never hear it? You see the Luxleigh property touches Wesmede north, south, and east. Of course it will be a wise marriage."

She was looking at me still, and the old light was within her eyes, and the gentle smile upon her lips; but oh, the whiteness of her face!

"I dare say, Miss Agnes," said I, bending over my fire, "that you had never even heard of it."

"Not—yet."

When she went away from the room so quietly, of course I wished I hadn't said a word; but still I'd done it with the fancy that it might be kinder to do it at once. Somehow it never seemed to enter the Squire's head that there could be danger to his plans in the close intimacy between his son and Miss Agnes; or in the charm to Mr. Will of such a sweet girl-companion in the home in which he'd never known a mother or a sister. As for Mr. Will, I don't think he ever even *tried*

to feel that Miss Agnes was like a sister to him, for from the first he had loved her as brothers don't love ; and—yes, after all these years I can say it as confidently as I said it then—firmly as Mr. Capleton's heart was set upon that projected marriage for his son, everything would have ended happily for Miss Agnes and Mr. Will, if it had not been for Captain Warder. No ; even yet I cannot tell *how*, but I feel as sure of it as I am that that's the wind, sobbing on its way across the heath.

When the day came for Mr. Will to leave home, no-one saw his parting with Miss Agnes, but two hours after I had watched the carriage out of sight, I found her standing at the window with her eyes fixed on the spot where it had disappeared ; and though they were filled with tears, I never saw that trustful look upon her face *so* trustful as it was at that minute.

I think that Miss Agnes had made a determination that, as far as she possibly could, she would be both son and daughter to Mr. Capleton in his son's absence ; and it was prettier than any picture to see them together—always together. She would walk with him round the estate, discussing alterations and improvements just as his son would have done ; his arm in hers, and always the brightest interest in her face. She would drive him for hours among his tenants, remembering everything for him, and doing as much, in her gentle quiet way, to win their hearts as he could do with all the wealth and power. She would ride beside him into Exeter on his weekly visits, and the two horses, by force of habit, kept so closely together that it became a proverb there. She would go with him to the heavy county dinners, leaning on his arm as his own daughter would have done, and so grateful to him for her plain white dress (and making so much of it in her pleasant way) that often when I've watched them off, my eyes have been too full to meet hers—the idea of it ! Tears, because she loved the old man so well.

But best of all was it to see them together through those long winter evenings at home, when she would sing to him, read to him, talk to him—ah, well, it is such a nature as hers, I think, that can make *home* for a man, in its highest and holiest sense.

For many weeks after Mr. Will left us, Captain Warder did not show himself at Wesmede, and when he came at last, walking quietly and undemonstratively through the little eastern door, it wasn't very wonderful that none of us could suspect, or be guarded against, the misery he brought. After that first visit, others followed rapidly ; and I understood very well how the Squire, having planned that marriage between Captain Warder and Miss Agnes, should be very willing to throw them together.

But still Miss Agnes avoided him whenever she could ; and once when I asked her (just for no purpose at all) which of her cousins she

liked best, the rush of pink to her face, and the trembling of her lips when she said "one was all truth and honour"—and then failed for words—was proof enough that she had sounded Captain Warder's nature.

Gradually, during those visits of Captain Warder's to Wesmede, there came a consciousness of something being wrong. I don't suppose I can make you understand, for I couldn't understand it myself, but all the peaceful calm of the old house seemed ruffled, and not only did we see that the Squire had grown suspicious of his adopted daughter, but we noticed that in every word he uttered of his absent son his voice had a fretfulness which I had never heard in it before. Quite sure I felt that Captain Warder's influence was effecting this change, but I could never have fully comprehended it if I had not once chanced to overhear him speaking unrestrainedly. The master had sent for me to the library to check some bills for him, and while I did it Captain Warder came in, bringing two foreign letters which he had called for in Exeter; thinking—so he said—to please his cousin by anticipating next morning's post. The master's eyes brightened at sight of his son's hand; but, with a slow smile—I remember thinking it the ugliest smile I ever saw—Captain Warder laid upon the Squire's letter one addressed in the same hand to Miss Agnes.

"Well?" questioned Mr. Capleton.

"May I hear, before I deliver this, of my cousin Will's health and welfare?" asked Captain Warder, putting his arm through the Squire's and sauntering with him into the next room, Miss Agnes' letter in one hand. I didn't pretend to go on with my figures, for every word they uttered reached me through the curtains, and presently I understood well enough *who* was making Mr. Will's absence fatal to the dear old home. From that very hour the end followed so naturally, in spite of its misery, that I seemed to have been expecting it all just as it came.

That very night, when I was sitting alone in my room, fancying the whole household was in bed, my door was softly opened, and Miss Agnes came in in her white dress, far more like a ghost than— She came in, I say, almost without a sound, and dropped upon her knees at my side just as she might have done if I had been her mother, and she—broken-hearted. I couldn't say a word; I only put my hands upon her soft dark hair, and tried to keep back the tears; old women are so silly with their tears.

"This is good-bye," she said presently, raising her white face; and at that moment the steadfast light within her eyes was sad to see. "*Good-bye.* This dear life is over for me—from to-night."

"My dear," I cried, as I took both her chilly hands in mine, "what is it that you mean, Miss Agnes?"

"I am—going." Her voice sank to a very whisper at the last word,

so no wonder I could not feel sure I had heard aright. Yet not for anything could I ask her again, because I seemed to understand it all so well, after those suspicions of Captain Warder's which I had overheard.

"I am going—to-morrow," she whispered, her wide eyes meeting mine with an unuttered longing in them. "I am going because—my uncle has lost—his trust in me. He thinks I would ruin—his son's—life. I ruin it! I have an old friend who will receive me—I think. She is poor, but I—will help her. I—need not be—a burden."

"Where is she, Miss Agnes?"

But no, not by hinting, or asking, or even entreating, could I win that information. She would not leave me the power of telling Mr. Will where she was gone.

"But tell him," she whispered, very softly, "please tell him—only this one thing; that kneeling here, just as I might have knelt at my own mother's side, I pray that he will do as his father wishes. I shall be quite happy—presently. His father has been as my father, and I have no word to say to-night, or ever, but—God bless him."

I don't know whether I answered at all; I fancy not; but I held her to my breast and—well, never mind that.

Strange to say, it was on the very next morning, just before Miss Agnes left us, that Lord Luxleigh brought his daughter to Wesmede; then of course I guessed that both my master and Captain Warder had been yesterday aware of her return. I was lingering with Miss Agnes in the hall—just making tasks to keep me beside her—when the two young ladies met. I was a poor judge of course, but I did think that the frail, sad girl, who was going alone into the world for the sake of Mr. Will, was far better worth his love than the girl who, with her foreign voice and dress and manners, was come to win what my dear was resigning. Quite courteously the Squire introduced his young cousin to Miss Luxleigh, but somehow his voice sounded all different.

Ah! how the minutes fled till she was gone, then how they crept by us, bringing us never the music of a girlish voice and willing step; bringing us even no word from the outer world to tell us of her. Though I could see that the Squire missed her more than words could say, he never even uttered her name. Captain Warder did wisely not to leave him alone just then, knowing what the empty rooms would be for him, after the bright companionship of his adopted daughter. The intercourse between Luxleigh and Wesmede became very close. Perhaps Miss Luxleigh enjoyed the Squire's perpetual narratives of his son's perfections, and perhaps adulation of every kind was welcome to her. In any case she came very frequently to Wesmede, and so aided Captain Warder's attempt to keep Mr. Capleton from being solitary.

So the time went on till Mr. Will's return. Of course I know nothing of what passed in that first interview between the father and son, but

I happened to meet my young master on the stairs just afterwards, and he passed me without a word or glance, his eyes burning, and his lips drawn tight upon his teeth. Later on, when I was tired of hearing him pacing to and fro in his own room, I ventured quietly in to him, to give him the welcome I'd always given in old times when he had come home from school or college. At first I thought he was going to turn away from me, but quite suddenly (as if he remembered that his secret lay in my keeping) he turned and greeted me. It was a good while, though, before I trusted myself to give him Miss Agnes' message, and almost as soon as ever I had repeated it—he, standing in utter stillness to listen—the door opened, and Captain Warder came in with his greeting; a greeting far too loud and cordial to be quite honest from him.

Mr. Will looked down with silent contempt upon his cousin's outstretched hand, then he turned to me as if he were not even aware that anyone else stood there. "Old friend," he said, "I am going away again, to fetch my cousin Agnes back to Wesmede; so you see I must answer your welcome by another good-bye."

I was looking straight into Captain Warder's face, but I could not find out whether his surprise was real or feigned. "Your father found himself deceived in Agnes Capleton," he said, "and naturally he will never consent to her return here."

Shall I ever forget my young master's fierce reply, or the savage gloom of Captain Warder's face when he left the room?

Mr. Will had a long interview with his father after that; and from what he told me afterwards, when he came to see if I could help him by the faintest clue to Miss Agnes' present home, I understood that my master had said if he could not return to marry Miss Luxleigh he need never return at all, and had strictly forbidden him to bring Miss Agnes to Wesmede. From that—even without being told—I could guess that Captain Warder had been present at the interview in spite of Mr. Will's earnest wish to see his father alone; but I did not wonder the father should fear trusting to himself this refusal of his son's anxious prayer.

Not for months after Mr. Will's departure, did the Squire betray any symptom of having taken to heart the defeat of his scheme or the absence of his son; and so the people grew to say he didn't care, and that Captain Warder was as good as any son to him; but I knew better. Sometimes, wandering to his door late in the night to be sure that all was well, I would hear the old man weeping like a girl; and a year afterwards I found those letters of Mr. Will's, which were never answered, worn to shreds, as a century could not have worn them had they lain in the Squire's desk instead of—where they *did* lie.

As time went on, and the old Squire's strength and spirit gradually failed him, he grew to lean more and more upon me; a sure sign that

his hard resolves were outliving his physical strength. But no wonder, for those resolves were constantly propped by crafty words and deeds of apparent devotion from the one enemy of all his good and kindly impulses. Just as if she understood the state of the case, Miss Luxleigh left off coming to Wesmede; and this served Captain Warder for another argument against Mr. Will; as I knew, because I was so often with my master now. He had grown so to depend upon my always being ready to his call that I heard the tales Captain Warder brought of Mr. Will's past life; stories, whether true or false, which he had simply raked up to widen the present breach, and which fulfilled their purpose with a cruel success. If I could by any means have discovered where Mr. Will was, all this time, I would myself have written him an entreaty to return and put an end to this misery; but I have shown you where those unanswered letters lay, and now they had ceased altogether. Never had the Squire let anyone look upon these, and Captain Warder's poison had done its work so well, that the very mention of Mr. Will's name now was enough to throw my master into a state of suppressed passion which was most dangerous for him in his enfeebled condition. At last, one day—nearly a year had passed since Mr. Will followed Miss Agnes from Wesmede, and though Captain Warder had heard of their marriage, he said, we did not know whether to believe it or not—the Squire's lawyers came over from Exeter, in a dogcart which Captain Warder had driven in, and spent a long day at Wesmede closeted with Mr. Capleton, whose raised unsteady tones reached me often as I passed the library door. There were many surmises among the servants as to the business in hand, but I never had a doubt at all; and when I went into the master's room at night (as I always did now, inventing some excuse or other just to see him the last thing, for I pitied him for the sore companion he had in his unquiet conscience), and he bid me wait a few minutes, I knew quite well what he was going to tell me. My guess was right. Squire Capleton had made a new will that day, disinheriting his only son, and leaving the whole of his property to Captain Warder, who was to assume the old name when he took possession of Wesmede. I stood near my master's chair, listening while he told me all this, and my lips seemed glued together; for if any sound had escaped them just then, it would have been a cry of anger which would have shut out from me my master's confidence for ever.

"You hear?" he questioned, sharply, when he had finished; and I thought there was a great eagerness in his sunken eyes—a great eagerness to hear *some one* say he had done right.

"I hear, sir," I said, when I could speak quietly and without exciting him, "but it signifies little to any of us. It isn't very likely we old servants will stay at Wesmede to see Captain Warder take our young master's place; or bear our old master's name to make it hated."

He turned to me, but his anger was too fierce to be more than instantaneous, and then there dawned upon his poor weak face a pitiful questioning. "I've done the only thing I could have done—the only thing," he said, his voice rising. "You are a silly, prejudiced woman; faithful as far as a woman's nature can go, but silly and prejudiced. Go to bed."

After that I threw away all fear of my old master, and talked to him daringly, often and often and often, both of his son and Miss Agnes. You see I could do them no harm then. He had done his worst. He could not either make them unhappier, or leave them more destitute, so I had no longer any fear for the effect of those words which would rise hotly and anxiously to my lips. Sometimes he was almost patient with me, and would only murmur the old reply, which he always uttered so very slowly, "I am glad I did it—very glad I did it."

But at other times he would loudly and fretfully silence me, ordering me from his presence. Yet—and this was sad even to me, because it so plainly betrayed his growing weakness—he would summon me again almost immediately, and presently would once more repeat the old assurance, which it was so plain to see *he* could not believe, repeat it as constantly as he might.

As the winter closed in, Captain Warder hardly left him. Perhaps even *he* could see now that the hard spirit was wearing out, as well as the thin bent form, and he feared more than ever to remove his influence. Day by day now my master clung more closely to his old servants, and he fretted so when I left him, that I got into the habit of bringing my work and my accounts to his room quite naturally; then of reading to him, as if that had always been a part of my day's work; and bringing him messages from the tenants; and of getting somehow to make him feel it natural to listen to me while he rested. Then you may be sure I let him feel what his people would think if (I never made it *when*) they were to have, for their master and their landlord, a man whom they had always honestly disliked, as they had always honestly disliked Captain Warder. But though in time all this grew natural to us, the Squire would never let me utter two sentences together of Mr. Will's return, or of forgiveness for him and Miss Agnes. At last this day came round—Mr. Will's birthday, and the last day of that year which had been so wretched for us all. The Squire had been so restless and ill the day before, that I had sat up in his room all night, and I remember noticing with what a start he rose from his pillows when I let in the daylight, asking me sharply what day it was. Standing beside him—and I know I must have looked as anxious as I felt—I told him. And then I gently led him on to recall those happy birthdays Mr. Will had always spent at home; going back even to that one when he had taken his baby as a New Year's gift from Heaven. Quite silently he listened to me, but his weak white fingers were pressed upon his eyes.

"O, master," I cried, folding my hands just as if I cried to my Master in Heaven, "forgive him, and bring him home once more."

Through all its pain, his face darkened with a great anger when I spoke, and he sent me from him as he had so often done before. But when I returned I found him sitting at the window in the feeble winter sunshine, looking himself more feeble than I had ever seen him look before, but with a gentleness in face and attitude which almost frightened me by its strong contrast to the passionate vehemence with which he had dismissed me an hour before.

"Hester," he said, calling me by the name he had been used to call me when I was a young girl about the house, learning from my mother how to take her place (the place I've filled for fifty years), "Hester, perhaps he will come to-day."

I had the hardest work in the world to prevent doing something foolish in my joy at hearing only those few words. To think that at last he should, of his own accord, and so gently, speak of Mr. Will's return! Ah, if it could but happen on that very day—that birthday which they had always spent together!

"No, no," said the Squire, sharply, guessing my motive, when I, in trembling anxiety, asked if he knew where Mr. Will would be this day. "No, no; and if I knew a hundred times you should not send."

But afterwards, as he still sat quietly beside the window, he spoke to me quite gently now and then, as if he read my thoughts while I sat working opposite him.

"Yes; he may come to-day—by his own wish. If not—never mind—never mind."

Then, as time went on: "Warder was right; he never meant to return. He was glad to break the old ties—irksome ties; and he and Agnes tired of them. Never mind—never mind."

"Perhaps," said I, with a sudden boldness, as unexpected by myself as by my master, "Mr. Will is too poor to travel now."

The Squire started forward on his chair, looking into my face with a new anguish; but the next moment he had sunk back again, and was murmuring softly to himself once more, "Pooh, pooh! Warder knew he borrowed money; he had no difficulty in doing that. My old age and my failing health made it easy for my heir to borrow. No; he had no difficulty. Warder heard of it all. Those men do not guess of my new will, though. Well, they deserve to suffer, for lending money to a rebellious son—a disobedient son. It is a just will, and Warder has promised that, in my place, he will do all that—my son has left undone. Yes, it is a just will."

Yet for all the reiterated words, it was plain to see that that will lay heavily upon my poor master's heart.

"Hester," he said once, looking wistfully at me in the waning after

noon light, "if he comes—to-day. If—loving the old times—he comes to me upon his birthday, to begin the new year with his hand in mine, I shall burn the will I made in my anger. If he does not, I shall know that all is best as it is."

Can any words describe the eagerness with which I watched that line of road across the heath, sitting motionless in my intense anxiety, and praying silently from my heart? But the daylight waned, and neither a carriage nor a solitary figure broke that line of bleak road which ended on the horizon.

"Leave them," said the Squire, almost roughly staying my hand, as I attempted to close the shutters when the world was all in darkness, "leave them until this day—and this old year—are dead."

The physician, who came over every day from Exeter, tried his best to woo my master from the gloom, saying, when he found all other attempts fail, that he wanted to dine with him beside the fire. But no, my master only shook his head gravely, and said he had a fancy for that seat to-night; and that his eyes were tired, and he did not need the light. So at last the physician went away, seeing he was useless, but he said he should return early in the morning, for he himself had been alarmed by the change this one day had made in Mr. Capleton, though he evidently saw no immediate danger. He thought it a pity that Captain Warder should happen to be away for that night, and I did not of course tell him how glad I was.

When I returned to my master's room, the firelight showed me his chair empty at the uncurtained window; and I was looking round in real alarm when he entered from the library. As he came forward, I saw that he carried a sealed packet, and my heart beat with joy when, with it in his hand, he came towards the fire.

"Oh, master, yes," I cried involuntarily, when he paused, "burn it to-night."

He closed his long weak fingers over it. "If he comes," he whispered, huskily, "I shall burn it. That will be my birthday gift to my repentant boy. If not—it is a just will—quite just, and it shall stand."

I saw it would be best to say no other word. His own longing to destroy the will was as strong as any persuasions could be, and I saw that there was *no* power which could urge him to it except his son's return—my poor, poor master!

So again we sat and watched, looking out into the darkness; and when the faintest sound broke the stillness, I could see, in the firelight, how my master started forward in his chair, his great hope hurrying his breath. Strange to say, as the darkness deepened, his confidence seemed to grow only the stronger and more steadfast, until at last, by its very simplicity as well as force, it had inspired in me a confidence just as strong.

The weather had been fine all day, though the wind was high ; and there had been fitful gleams of sunshine falling upon my master's old, worn face, like the angel-touches falling now upon his heart. But after the sun had set, the weather changed, and each gust of wind sent noisy splashes of rain against the uncovered window panes. But, through all the dreariness of the night and the rain and the darkness, we sat on ; watching without seeing, and listening intently for *one* sound which yet never *could* have been heard above the roar of the wind.

Once, during that long watch, I was summoned downstairs. I stood for a few minutes in the brightly-lighted kitchen, giving the orders which the servants needed, and after that glare the darkness of the Squire's room struck heavily upon my heart ; but saddest of all was it to see the new attitude of eager expectancy in which I found him now. He was leaning forward on the arms of his chair, and he did not turn his face from the window even while he spoke to me in a low, hurried voice : "The moon has risen. Come quickly, Hester. When this cloud has passed we shall see the road across the heath. Wait ! wait ! It lay just now almost as clearly as in daylight. The clouds are heavy, but after each passes we shall see. There ! there !"

He had risen from his chair. With the hand which held the sealed packet, he leaned against the window, with the other he shaded his eyes to peer forth into the night. The moonlight showed me this, and nothing more, till he dropped his hand from his face and seized my arm.

"See ! it is like daylight. Does he come ?"

That road across the heath lay wet and clear and glistening, just as we have seen it lie to-night ; and my younger, stronger eyes searched the spot where my master's eyes were fixed ; yet it was *his* cry of joy which first broke the silence.

"There ! there !" he cried, and I, trembling so that I could scarcely stand, tried to give shape to that gliding shadow on the straight, wet road.

"I see, I see," my master whispered, his thin form heaving with an almost terrible emotion, "he—is come."

"I cannot see," I said, only because I so dreaded a disappointment for him now.

"Not see?" he questioned, turning to me with a gentle perplexed smile. "Go, Hester, and make sure that the fire is burning brightly in his room ; and have Rollo unchained and brought into the house. It will make the faithful old dog young again to see the master he loves. Let the whole house be ready to welcome him. Let his rooms look just as they used to look. They cannot be too bright to-night. Make haste, because he comes so quickly."

It was well that those hungry clouds had hidden the moon again, for I could not keep the tears away ; and, in the midst of his eager joy, my master would have been hurt to see them.

"He comes on horseback, Hester. Have his horse well cared for. It will need rest after having come so fast—you saw how fast he flew, didn't you?" My master was walking with me towards the door as he hurried through these loving orders, and the packet was tightly grasped in his hand.

"You will burn it now, sir? You will destroy it before I bring up my young master?"

"No," he said, a shadow falling over his eager white face, as he nervously changed the will from hand to hand, "I must see his face and hear his voice; then it shall flame to ashes. Hark!"

The quick, bright word, and my master's sudden pause with outstretched hands and uplifted head, stopped me on my way; and so I was still standing beside him, in a gleam of brightest moonlight, when Mr. Will came in; and that cry from his father's lips made me reel blindly for one moment.

I saw that my young master had come straight and hurriedly there, for the rain was thick upon his hair and dress, and the hand he gave me, when his father released it, was wet and cold. Seeing this, I was hastening to his room that he might find a bright fire there (though there was little fear, for I had had the room ready all that day), when my master called me back.

"Stay, Hester," he said, in a new bright tone, "you deserve to see this burnt. It is all over now. See!"

He dropped the sealed packet into the very heart of the hot wide fire, and now sat watching it crumble into ashes, while his face had a smile upon it which was almost radiant in its ease and happiness. Mr. Will stood watching too, but very gravely, and when presently every trace of the paper had disappeared, he dropped upon his knees beside his father's chair, and, with his face hidden, sobbed just three words, as I pray I may never hear man sob again:

"Father, forgive me!"

The words were stopped upon his lips by the old man's loving fingers. "It is I, Will—it is I who need forgiveness. But this *is* forgiveness. God will pardon us both, and no one again can separate us."

I had softly closed the door upon them then, and for a long while I lingered in Mr. Will's rooms, giving them all the homeliness I could. Then I went down with orders for the young master's supper. It hardly surprised me to find that the servants in the house did not know he had arrived, for I knew that if they had seen him they would have taken his wet coat. There was quite a shout of joy when I told them my news, and some of them followed me to the master's door that they might be first to greet Mr. Will. They stood back quietly for me to go in alone, but—ah me! my cry soon brought them.

There sat our master beside the glowing fire, with still that smile of

full content on his pale lips ; but the lips were motionless for evermore, and he was all alone. Neither the glow of the fire, nor the moonlight shining in now unhindered, showed us any figure save that solitary sleeping one of our old master.

More to tell ? very little ; and how nervous it makes one, in this fitful moonlight and the rush of rain and wind, and with those weird flying shadows which the firelight throws upon the pictures. Surely you know the end as well as I do.

Not one of the servants, even the oldest among them, ever jested with me about my account of the young master's return in the dying of the old year ; but I heard them whispering together afterwards, when I fell ill, that that strange dream of mine had warned them of an illness. Dream !

For days and weeks, and even months, Captain Warder carried on the fruitless search for Mr. Capleton's will, firmly convinced that the Squire himself must have removed it—his private bureau had a lettered lock which none but himself understood, and this was untouched at his death—only to place it in another hiding place. But the search was vain, and of course I had no tale to tell *him*.

But the search for Mr. Will was longer and more wearisome still, and the Squire had been two months dead, and Captain Warder was beginning to feel secure in the mastership at Wesmede, when the Exeter lawyers sent us word they had traced Mr. Capleton's heir. That very night they arrived at Wesmede in a postchaise, and brought my master's heir, lying asleep in his mother's arms. In a moment I recognised Miss Agnes, when she came into the hall shyly and sadly, in her heavy mourning, just as she had first come to us ; and no voice was needed to tell any of us for whom she wore that widow's cap around her small sad face.

Ah ! what a sad home-coming it was ! Miss Agnes—it seemed so natural to have her back that I could not for a time get out of using the old name—tried very hard, as we could see, to shake off her weight of grief, but I did not wonder that for so long it was impossible to her.

During that wreck, on New Year's Eve, of the sailing vessel in which she and her husband and baby were coming from Australia, to plead in person for their father's pardon, she had been rescued with the other women and children sorely against her will, as she wished to stay beside her husband. But with tears and prayers he had urged her, assuring her there was chance for all, but only if she left him then. So he had seen her safe into the boat, and then had laboured to save others, until he and the captain were alone upon the deck of the sinking ship in which they had been homeward bound. One sailor, who was saved, had told her how he had seen Mr. Will at the last moment kneeling on the wet deck, himself wet through, his head

upon his folded arms ; and how he had heard him sob three words— which might well have been the cry from every heart that night— “ Father, forgive me ”—and then gone down upon the broken ship.

And when Miss Agnes had told me this, with stiff white lips and tearless eyes which were almost proud in their great love, I found that I could tell her how my master had died on that New Year's Eve, with his hands upon his son's head, answering that very prayer with his own appeal for pardon. I remember how the light broke upon her pale face—just that steady, trustful light of old—when she heard how they were together at the very last ; and though she said no word to me, I know to Whom she *did* breath grateful words.

Yes, that's her portrait : and if there's another lady in all the land better beloved than she has been for these five-and-twenty years through which she has lived among us at Wesmede, I should like to know where that lady's home may be.

Quite happy looking ? indeed she is. Isn't it always a life which is lived for others that is the happiest of all ? And would not the love of such a son crown any mother's life with blessing ?

Yes ; that's the present Squire. A handsome face you called it ; but if you knew him as I know him, you would see far more than that ; and when I look at the two portraits opposite I like to think how proud the old Squire and Mr. Will would have been to see how nobly he reigns here in their stead ; while they—are resting.



SUNRISE AND SUNSET.

THE ruddy sunrise called to the sunset,

(Burning gold and violet,)

Sending his message by the op'ning rose,

And every air that blows,

“ Turn thy bright footsteps to the summer moon,

“ And meet me soon,—

“ Aye, meet me, clasp me, kiss me, at mid-noon ! ”

So the fair sunset to the fresh sunrise

Turned her faint eyes,

Called back the colour to her fading face,

And spread her arms, and yearned to his embrace :

“ It cannot be, my brother, O bright Day !

“ There is no place in all the starry way,

“ Where thou and I may meet,—warm life,—and wan decay.

C. M. GEMMER (*Gerda Fay*).

MY AUNT'S LEGACY.

MY father is a farmer, in sufficiently easy though not exactly affluent circumstances; and he, with my mother and brothers, live in the house where all of us, except my mother, first saw the light. At the time when the event here recorded took place I lived with them, but I have been away from home for many a year now.

The house is a large, rambling building, constructed of red bricks, and abounding in numerous long, low rooms. We are simple, primitive people, and generally sit and take our meals in a room leading out of the kitchen. But we have two state parlours, which, in our eyes at least, are very grand, and which we use on those rare occasions when we wish to make a show in the eyes of the world; or rather in the eyes of those few and isolated members of it who, at long intervals, come our way.

My name is Sebastian Gregg Felton, and I am one of a family of five, all boys, in which I occupy the generally unenviable position of being in the middle. I say generally unenviable, because, as a rule, the eldest and youngest of a family get the best of it, and the others rather go to the wall. But in my case I had nothing to complain of, as I happened to be my mother's prime favourite.

Several reasons conspired to produce this result. To begin with, I had been a very delicate child, and great doubts had been entertained as to the possibility of rearing me. Children that cause most anxiety are generally liked best; and as I had rewarded my mother for all the care bestowed upon me by growing into a tall, broad-shouldered fellow, who seemed quite to have forgotten what ill health was, she naturally felt grateful to me, and inclined to think me a very meritorious character. Another thing that disposed her in my favour was that I had been infinitely more troublesome than all her other boys put together; as, whenever my health allowed it, I had been from my earliest infancy in some mischief or other; though, to do myself justice, I had never been guilty of anything mean or underhanded. There was one other circumstance that made me looked upon with favour, not only by my mother, but by the whole family as well: and that was that I was considered to have expectations. In other words, I was thought to have a very good chance of being heir to an aunt of my father's, who had a very comfortable little fortune of her own. But I will talk of this by-and-by, when I have told the reader a little more about myself.

At the time of this story I was four-and-twenty years old, six feet

high, broadly built enough to match my height, and—my native modesty recoils from writing this—very good-looking. In disposition I was lighthearted and fond of fun, my former leaning towards mischief having by no means deserted me.

Though but one-and-twenty, I had for some years been engaged to Claribel Myer, the daughter of a well-to-do miller who lived not very far from us. She was a pretty, lively little being, with dark hair and eyes, a roguish smile, and a sweet figure, and she was a great pet with everybody.

But to proceed to the more important part of my tale.

One evening, as we were all sitting at tea, the postman came to the door—in itself so unusual an event that it caused quite an excitement. There was a general rush to see what he had got, and I, being nearest, was out first and obtained the letter. It was addressed to my mother, and everybody was much interested in the opening and reading of it. It turned out to be from the aunt from whom I was supposed to have my expectations, and after whom I had received my beautiful second name of Gregg.

Here let me stop for a moment to inform the reader that our notion as to my chance was by no means unfounded. It did not arise from a general feeling of covetousness on our part, or from the idea that seems common in some families, that everyone is bound to leave them property. Shortly before I was born, Miss Gregg wrote to my father, saying that should the expected child prove a boy she would be much complimented if he would give it her name; and concluded with certain dark and somewhat mysterious hints which it seemed to him could bear but one interpretation. I need hardly observe that when I appeared, and turned out to be a boy, I was duly christened according to my aunt's wishes. She had never set eyes upon me, or indeed taken the slightest notice of me from that moment to this; but still the hope of expectations, if it burned rather dimly sometimes, never went out.

When it was discovered from whom the letter came, the excitement naturally increased greatly; and my mother's spectacles not being forthcoming quickly enough to suit the impatience of the company, as I was considered to have the greatest interest in the matter, and was also believed to be the best scholar in the family, the epistle was put into my hands, with an exhortation to read it aloud. I did so, and read as follows:—

“DEAR MADAM,—Your son, who bears my name, must by this time be pretty well, if not quite, grown up, and I have a fancy to see what he is like. With your permission I shall therefore come to your house on Friday next, and, also with your permission, will remain the night.

“I am, dear Madam, yours truly,

“PRISCILLA GREGG.”

When I had finished the perusal, silence reigned for some time ; everybody was too much astonished to speak. When they recovered themselves they all turned to me.

"Well, Sebastian," said my father, "this is a chance for you ; mind you make the best of it."

"You know, Sebastian," chimed in one of my brothers, "you have a very pleasant way with old ladies when you choose, and now is the time for showing it."

"Yes, indeed," remarked my eldest brother ; "it will all depend upon your pleasing her or not, whether you come in for the money."

"Of course Sebastian will please her," retorted my mother, taking my part against them. Then, not wishing to lose the opportunity of a little advice on her own account, she went on, "But do mind, Sebastian, that you are particularly nice to her, and very attentive and differential, and——"

"Oh, please don't give me any more directions, mother," I answered, stopping my ears. "I shall get so confused, I shan't know what to do at all." So saying I left the room, and went to tell Claribel what was about to happen.

This important letter had come on a Wednesday. The day intervening between its arrival and my aunt's was spent by my mother in thoroughly cleaning our already thoroughly clean rooms, and in preparing all sorts of nice things for the expected guest. In looking back now upon all these preparations, and remembering why they were so very carefully attended to, I can't help thinking that we were rather of the nature of toadies ; but still it happened, and in my character of faithful historian I must tell the truth.

At last the time when the important visitor might be looked for had come, and we were all in a flutter of expectation. My mother had put on her best dress, a steel-grey silk, and a cap trimmed with cherry-coloured ribbons, that was supposed to suit her better than anything else she had. I had yielded to the advice and entreaties of my surroundings, and had dressed myself very carefully in a new suit I had just had made.

We all hovered about near the door, trying to look unconcerned, but failing signally. After a time the sound of approaching wheels told us that the person for whom we were looking was near at hand. Another moment, and the omnibus which plied in the neighbourhood drew up before our garden gate, and a lady, that I rightly supposed was my aunt, alighted.

She was a small, spare woman, with a somewhat severe expression of face, and a sharp, piercing eye, that seemed at once to take stock of everything within a mile of her, and that had the effect of anything in the world rather than that of setting you at your ease. It was with an inward trembling—by no means concealed from one another, if hidden

from her eyes—that we went forward to receive our newly arrived relative; but we managed it pretty well, and before long she was safely installed in the smaller parlour. Then, after the interval of a few moments, my mother suggested that she might like to go to her room and remove her travelling dress, and as she at once took this suggestion, the rest of us were left with a little breathing time.

As far as I was concerned, however, this respite was a very short one. In drawing up a plan of the course of action to be pursued, which had been done in family conclave with the utmost amount of care and deliberation, it had been arranged that, as my aunt might like a private interview with me, I should be, apparently by accident, in the best parlour when she came downstairs again, and that my mother should adroitly withdraw, of course also by accident, and leave us there together.

Accordingly, not long after the two ladies had gone upstairs, I went to the appointed spot, and assumed what seemed to me very much the position of a spider in a web looking for flies. The position was by no means a pleasant one to me, but I consoled myself with the reflection that, on this occasion at least, the fly was by no means an unwary one.

I had not been waiting many minutes before the ladies came down again. I went to the door of the room as gracefully as I could, and my mother upon seeing me remarked, with an air of impromptu that really did her credit:

“Oh, here is Sebastian; will you excuse me for a few moments if I leave you to him?”

My aunt, little suspecting that this was part of a deep-laid plot, bowed with old-fashioned politeness, by no means wanting in stateliness, and surrendered herself to my care.

There was something in the solemnity of the whole proceeding, coupled with the knowledge of what designing humbugs we all were, that made keeping properly grave very difficult to me. But with an effort I managed to repress the smile that tried so hard to rise to my lips, and went forward to take possession of my aunt.

On each side of the fireplace, which was filled at this moment with gaily-coloured paper—for the time of the year was summer—stood an arm-chair, very old fashioned, like the rest of our furniture, with thin, spindley legs, and wide seats covered with chintz. As these were the most dignified-looking objects in the room, I thought the best thing would be to offer one of them to the lady to whom I was doing the honours. Accordingly I led her up to one of them, turned away with the most courtly bow I could manage, and going to the one opposite to her, sat down.

But, oh horror! in the course of the rummage that had taken place in this room to prepare it for the expected guest, the seats of these two

chairs had been taken out, and, little as we suspected it, mismatched. No sooner did my weight come upon it, than the treacherous foundation on which I had hoped securely to repose, gave way, the seat tilted up, and in an instant I found myself sitting through the framework, my knees and my nose almost in contact, and utterly unable to extricate myself.

It had happened so suddenly and unexpectedly that at first I was too much astonished to think of anything but myself; but in an instant I remembered my aunt and looked across at her. My feelings may be imagined when I discovered that she was in exactly the same position as myself, as utterly unable to help herself, and evidently as much astonished as I was. Just as I caught sight of her, however, her self-possession seemed to return, and in angry accents, rendered somewhat uncertain by the inconvenient posture in which she was, she said:

"So, Mr. Sebastian! this is the way in which you treat your relations?"

I have all my life been possessed of a very keen sense of the ludicrous. Whether that possession be an advantage or not I have never quite been able to determine, there is so much to be said on both sides. The position in which we now were, and which indeed was funny enough to have tickled the fancy of the gravest of mankind, amused me so irresistibly that, regardless of the consequences, I burst into a hearty peal of laughter.

Of course the madness of this proceeding became apparent to me at once, and making a desperate effort to check my mirth, and to speak gravely, I began:

"I assure you, Aunt Gregg——"

"There's no good in assuring me anything," interrupted my aunt. "If you were to go on assuring me from now till the last moment of my life, I should not believe you."

"But, my dear aunt——"

"Don't dear aunt me! Do you think I'm not capable of putting two and two together and making four? And when I find you alone in a room, and then find myself in such a position as this, do you suppose that I am going to believe that you didn't do it on purpose?"

Evidently my aunt had no strong perception of what was funny, or she would never have spoken of what had happened in this way. Her gravity tickled me even more than the accident itself, and I had to bite my lip nearly through before I could get out:

"But do try to believe——"

"I shan't try to do anything of the kind! Is your behaviour likely to make me believe in your innocence? If you are sorry for what has happened, why don't you come and help me out, instead of stopping there laughing like an idiot?"

"I really can't move. I would get out if I could," I answered,

struggling faintly. "But I am fixed tight, and can do nothing." And again I was nearly choked by my effort to swallow my laughter.

"Nonsense," Miss Gregg returned in a tone of increased severity. "People of your age are never helpless unless they choose to be so." And thereupon she relapsed into dignified silence, leaving me to feel more ridiculous than I had ever done in my life before.

We were not left many moments in this most unenviable situation, before the door of the room opened and my mother came in. With surprise and horror she perceived the plight in which we were placed, and running to my aunt, helped her up, apologizing to the worthy lady enough, as it seemed to me, to have excused the most dire injury.

Miss Gregg once more began to express her opinion that I had done it on purpose, when my mother thought it better to join with her and abuse me soundly. My assurances that the misfortune was a pure accident convinced her of my innocence, though they had quite failed to convince my aunt, and she came over to my side at once, and tried, with all the eloquence of which she was possessed, to win the irate old lady; but in vain. Miss Gregg was most fully persuaded that I had intentionally offered to her dignity the insult it had recently received, and she continued to express her hostile sentiments in the most indignant terms.

We proceeded for some time to talk in the most persuasive and convincing manner at our command, but to no purpose. My aunt would not listen to what we had to say in my defence, and declared persistently and in the most emphatic terms that she would go home at once and never enter our house again. We knew too well what effect such conduct would have upon us, that it would be the end of all our hopes; and we were getting more and more into despair, when suddenly a bright idea came to me. I would go and fetch Claribel. I had the utmost belief in her power of soothing people.

My mother soon understood from the signs I made her what I thought of doing, and as she evidently approved my idea, I left her trying to pacify my aunt and persuade her of my innocence, and started off. It did not take me long to get over the ground between our house and Mr. Myer's, or to explain what had happened to his daughter; and in a very short time Claribel and I returned together.

It turned out just as I had expected. Although my aunt was still very angry, and at first would not even look at the intended mediator, before long she had given in to her pretty, coaxing ways (who indeed could help giving in when Claribel set to work to make them?) and was sitting at the dinner-table in our best parlour on my father's right hand, with my dear girl on the other side of her.

Of course, after this there was no good in pretending to keep up her resentful feelings, and my aunt spent the rest of the day and the succeeding night under our roof as she had originally intended. I did

my very best during that time to cancel, by constant attention, the bad impression that had been made upon her. And I suppose I in great measure succeeded ; for as she was going away, and I was standing at the door of the coach in which she was seated, waiting for it to start, she put her hand upon mine, and said :

"I believe that you did not intentionally insult me, after all, Sebastian."

Another moment and the coach had driven off, and I had seen my aunt for the last time.

* * * * *

It is now some years since this memorable event happened. I have become a farmer on my own account, and am settled not very far from the place in which Mr. Myer and my father still live. Claribel has changed from a lively girl into a sweet, contented woman, and we are surrounded by numerous rosy-cheeked, healthy-looking children. Not very long after her visit to our house, my aunt died, and left me her heir. The property was enough to enable me to purchase the farm I now possess, and to marry Claribel at once.

We are very happy, and never forget to associate the memory of Miss Gregg with our happiness. But even at this distance of time we can never think without a smile of the accident that so nearly made shipwreck of all our hopes. And of all the stories I tell my children as we sit round the fire of a winter's evening, the one they like best to hear is the history of how I nearly lost my aunt's legacy.



CHECKMATE.

One maiden heard another sighing,
And cried, "Dear Phyllis, what's your grief?"
She answered, "Cupid homeward flying
Shot me, and stole my heart—the thief."

Said merry Joan, "A rogue, I fear me,
Sooner than he should serve me so,
I vow if he dared venture near me
• I'd box his ears, and break his bow !"

But when Love found that Joan had chid him,
Casting about what he could do,
In Damon's eyes he went and hid him,
And ambushed there he shot her too.

S. E. G.

THE PRISON HAWK.

The gaol quadrangle is bright with flow'rs,
 But the wild hawk mopes in its fragrant bow'rs,
 And seems as though counting the weary hours
 Of his strange captivity.
 Then he away from his rocky dell,
 Less sad than the prisoner in his cell,
 Shut out from the sun he loves so well,
 Shut in with its misery.

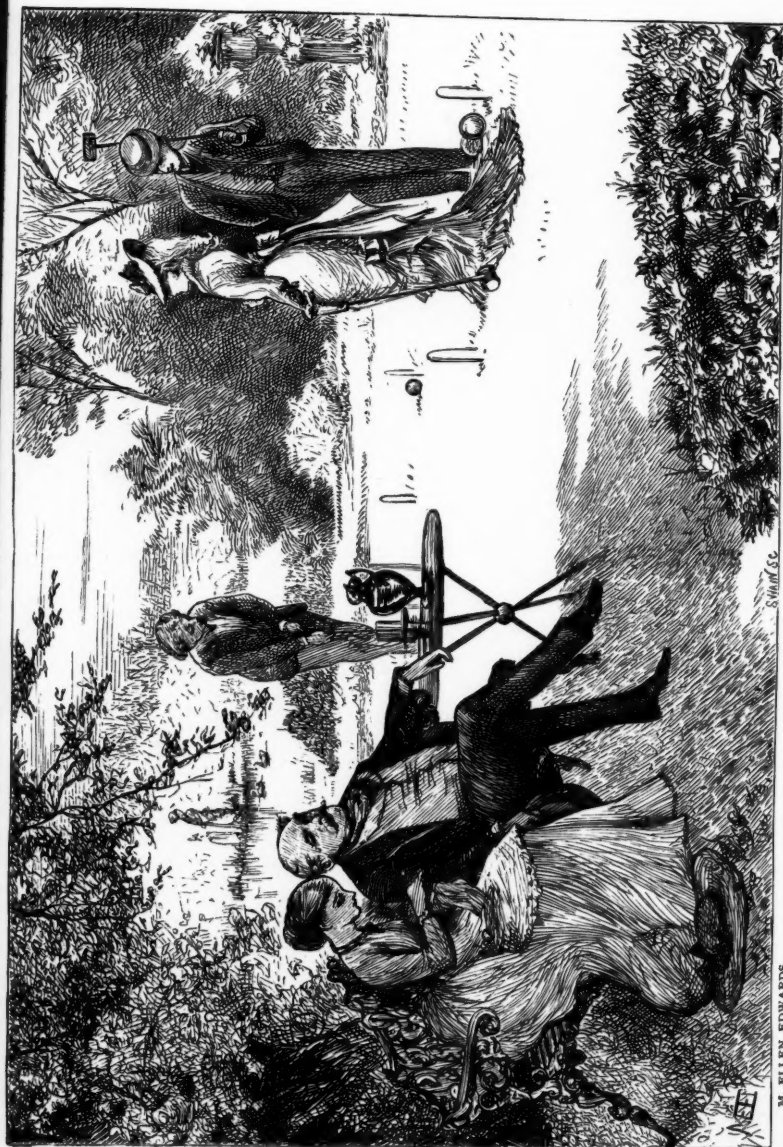
Narrow-barred windows look on the square
 Too high for view of the myrtles fair
 And the richer blossoms gathered there
 In merciless mockery
 Of the gloom and wretchedness all around,
 Of the strong walls with which the space is bound,
 Of the clank of hand-cuffs and measured sound
 Of the warders passing by.

The hawk's keen eye hates the colours gay,
 He pines by night and he pines by day,
 He longs for the dear woods far away,
 For scent of heather and brake :
 But his wings are clipped, and he may not fly
 Up toward the open and sunny sky.
 Oh, to be free, if even to die !—
 Dying for freedom's sake.

The months have passed, his wings have grown,
 Forth from the prison the hawk has flown ;
 But the outward world is drear and lone !—
 Where are the doves to slay ?
 Where are the woods, and where is his mate ?
 Freedom is sweet, but it comes too late ;
 Death for freedom the poor bird's fate ;
 He, freedom's hapless prey.

EMMA RHODES.





M. ELLIS EDWARDS.

AT EAGLES' NEST.

J. SWAIN.